

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER TOOLKIT

APRIL 2014

THE KRESGE FOUNDATION

Postsecondary  
State Policy



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE





## STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER TOOLKIT

April 2014

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### INTRODUCTION

*Student Success Center Toolkit* is a compilation of materials organized to assist Student Success Center directors as they staff, launch, operate, and sustain Centers. The toolkit features materials created and used by existing Centers, such as staffing and budgeting templates, launch materials, sample meeting agendas, and fundraising and sustainability information. Those materials are supplemented by relevant resources from JFF and other national organizations.

The toolkit allows Student Success Centers to share and learn from one another. In addition, the toolkit is designed to accelerate the time by which new Center directors are able to launch operations and provide value to the colleges. We hope to reduce the learning curve for new Centers by leveraging the experience of existing Student Success Centers.

The toolkit uses the JFF brief, *Joining Forces: How Student Success Centers Are Accelerating Statewide Community College Improvement Efforts* as an organizing construct. Users may access the links working through the toolkit sequentially. Alternatively, users may use the [Resource List](#) to access specific content of interest.



## THE KRESGE FOUNDATION

There's an emerging trend in the national college completion movement. A group of small but powerful Student Success Centers is creating statewide impact in states traditionally devoid of a strong centralized tradition of community college governance. Growing directly out of a decade of hard work to dramatically boost student completion rates in the community college—through national reform efforts such as [Achieving the Dream](#), the Developmental Education Initiative, [Breaking Through](#), and [Completion by Design](#)—Student Success Centers organize a state's community colleges around common action to accelerate their efforts to improve student persistence and completion. The problem they are tackling is real, and has significant implications for the future of our nation's citizens: According to U.S. Department of Education statistics, in 2008 only 26 percent of first-time beginning community college students attained a degree or certificate within five years.

For Caroline Altman Smith, senior program officer at The Kresge Foundation, the Centers' biggest appeal is the idea of a "small number of staff members in a state who wake up every morning focused on nothing but student success issues at the community college."

Student Success Centers have been created in five states to date: [Arkansas](#), [Michigan](#), [New Jersey](#), [Ohio](#), and [Texas](#) ([see Table 1 on page 16](#)).

The Centers' founders describe a similar decision-making process leading to their establishment: As the student success movement took root, and a critical mass of each states' community colleges joined a

national reform effort (Achieving the Dream is the common thread), the colleges and their supporting associations came to believe that their hard work could be strengthened and amplified if there were some statewide, cross-college supports in place. In particular, the colleges felt they could benefit from: more coordination and collaboration across the colleges; common data definitions that would

provide comparable information; shared professional development venues; and the time and space to think, exchange, and discuss strategy and execution. In essence, the Centers were developed to "connect the dots" between the many initiatives underway in their states. Given their geographic dispersion—from New Jersey to Texas—and their states' highly decentralized environments, one might expect the Centers to have evolved in very different forms. However, while each reflects local context, they are on the whole remarkably similar in form and function.

[The Kresge Foundation](#) has been a critical thought partner and supporter for most of the Centers now in place. Noting that philanthropy has played a role in creating and growing the many student success initiatives around the country, Caroline Altman Smith, senior program officer at The Kresge Foundation, observed that foundations have a responsibility to help states and their colleges manage and maximize their efforts. But for Altman Smith, the Centers' biggest appeal is the idea of a "small number of staff members in a state who wake up every morning focused on nothing but student success issues at the community college."

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

## I. WHAT DO STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS LOOK LIKE?

**Existing Student Success Centers** have many common characteristics. They were conceived by and are housed in their states' associations of community college presidents and trustees. They all have advisory boards to help develop strategic direction, but remain accountable to the host association's governing board. Recognizing the importance of some independence from the host organization for both credibility and sustainability, The Kresge Foundation deliberately structured its grant support to require each Center to have:

- Its own **budget**, so the hosting association cannot dip into the Center's budget;
- Dedicated staff, with titles relevant to the Center; and
- An **advisory board**, with prescribed minimal overlap with the host's governing board.

The five existing Student Success Centers have small staffs—on average, about two full-time employees (see *Table 1 on page 13*). Interviewees would like a little more staff capacity, but are also comfortable with what one described

as a “lean but very productive core staff.” They all extend their staffing capacity through consultants, faculty on leave from the colleges, interns, and—perhaps most importantly—existing staff at the host associations. They also expand their reach through partnerships with other organizations in the state (e.g., four-year college associations, K-12 and workforce agencies) though few of those partnerships are formal or contractual.

Thus far, only two Centers (Arkansas and Texas) have separate, dedicated space that physically resembles a “center,” but in today's virtual world that doesn't seem to pose a problem. Indeed, many Center leads noted

“The essence of the Success Center work is keeping [colleges] connected and helping them help each other,” said Ruth Silon, executive director of Ohio's Student Success Center.

that their success really depends on being out on the campuses and at partner meetings. As Larry Nespoli, president of the New Jersey Council of County Colleges observed, “The Center for Student Success is less about a physical presence than it is a statewide network of support.”

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**collaborate** alignment **coherence**  
time and space **policy** sustainability  
professional development fundraising  
reform **data** convenings **student**  
**success** partner connections  
communicate **scale** engage  
**leadership** hub research **faculty**  
focus think **statewide** dev ed

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### EXAMPLES OF JOB POSTINGS FROM EXISTING STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

- [Executive Director, Ohio Student Success Center](#)
- [Director, Arkansas Center for Student Success](#)
- [Executive Director, Texas Success Center](#)

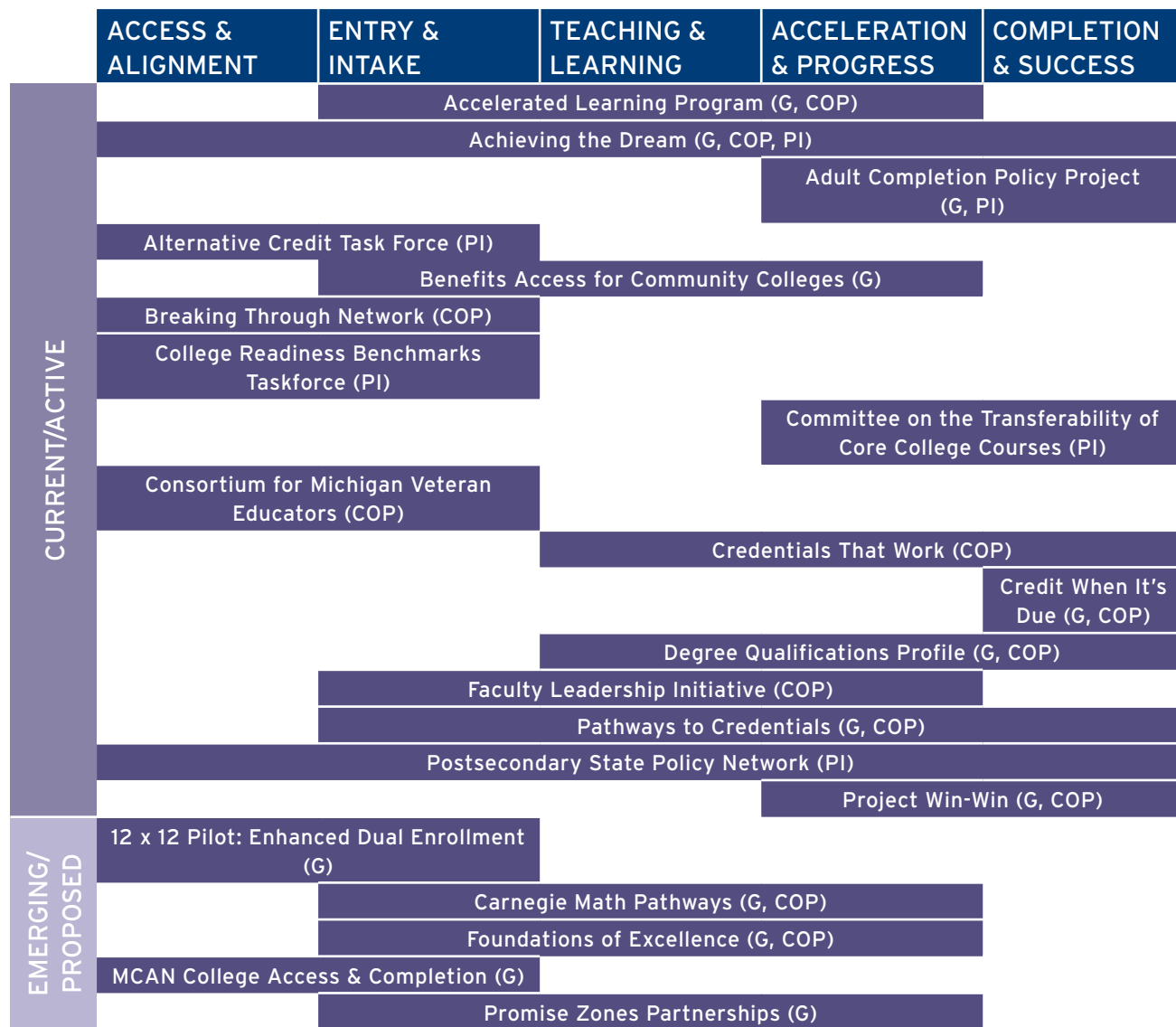
### EXAMPLES OF PARTNERSHIPS BUILT BY THE STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

- [New Jersey Center for Student Success](#)
- [Texas Student Success Council](#)
- [JFF's brief on the Texas Student Success Council](#)

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

FIGURE 1.

MICHIGAN CENTER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS, CURRENT AND EMERGING INITIATIVES BASED ON THE STUDENT SUCCESS FRAMEWORK, APRIL 2013



**COP:** Community of Practice      **G:** Grant      **PI:** Policy Initiative

## II. WHAT DO STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS DO?

**Cohherence** of the myriad initiatives that comprise the student success agenda is a key focus for all of the Centers. “Everywhere you turn,” Ron Abrams, recently-

retired president of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges observed, “there is attention and pressure around completion, but everyone uses different terminology. We are trying to provide coherence so we are having the same conversation.” Many of these states are juggling the demands, metrics and

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

College presidents from New Jersey have described their Center’s approach as “collaborative autonomy,” a fitting way to describe the effort to knit together the efforts of colleges that have long enjoyed a measure of independence they hold dear.

deliverables of upwards of 20 student success initiatives—clearly no small feat. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the array of [initiatives underway in Michigan](#), and how the Center for Student Success has [mapped the initiatives](#) to promote greater alignment across them.

Angela Oriano, executive director of

the [Texas Success Center](#) which opened on September 1, 2013, similarly described the opportunity before her: “Texas has a long and successful history of [targeted initiatives](#) to increase student success. The Texas Success Center has the opportunity to collaborate—and bring an increased coherence to the work—with the collective focus of maximizing all efforts across the state.”

The Centers also strive to increase **communications and collaboration** across colleges. “Faculty from across the colleges rarely get to share information, except at a conference,” said Ruth Silon, executive director of Ohio’s Student Success Center. “I see my job as taking them ‘beyond the conference.’ The essence of the Success Center work is keeping them connected and helping them help each other.” Silon started her work by developing a survey and heading out to visit each of the colleges to build relationships and develop a solid understanding of which colleges are engaged in which success initiatives. College presidents from New

Jersey have described their Center’s approach as “collaborative autonomy,” a fitting way to describe the effort to knit together the efforts of colleges that have long enjoyed a measure of independence they hold dear.

In an era of intense focus on how to [scale](#) reforms across a state’s colleges, Student

Success Centers sit in

a key place of leverage. Rey Garcia, president of the [Texas Association of Community Colleges](#), noted that TACC’s member colleges “sensed that there were haves and have-nots in the success movement. The Center creates the ability to engage all institutions in the success conversation.” Similarly, Mike Leach, director of the [Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges’ Center for Student Success](#), described a moment when the staff at the association realized they “[had seen how Achieving the Dream had really changed the culture at the colleges](#) to be constantly focused on student success. We wanted to find a way to bring that work and vision to our other colleges.”

To meet the goals of connections, collaboration, coherence, and the scale of evidence-based practices, the Centers engage in a variety of activities and initiatives. All place special emphasis on engaging faculty in the leadership of reform efforts, so that reforms gain support and traction on the ground.

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## EXAMPLES OF OTHER STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER INITIATIVES

[New Jersey Center for Student Success](#)

[Texas Success Center](#)

SuccessNC is another example of [Mapping Multiple Student Success Initiatives](#) into a Coherent Framework

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

To do so, the Centers regularly host statewide convenings on reform topics, and create mechanisms for sustained involvement such as [faculty inquiry groups](#) and communities of practice. In its first few months of operation, the [New Jersey Center](#) hosted 10 statewide summits, on topics ranging from student services innovations to developmental education redesign; the Michigan Center has launched the Faculty Leadership Initiative designed to promote faculty as leaders in student success reforms. President Jim Jacobs of Michigan's Macomb Community College emphasized the importance of the Centers' role in giving faculty space for convening and thinking: "Faculty can go to the Center for Student Success independent of whatever I think because it's their initiative, not my initiative."<sup>1</sup>

The identification of and advocacy for appropriate policy, grounded in practice, is a growing focus for the Centers. Center staff keep an ear to the

## FACULTY ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES

A JFF report on [How States Can Accelerate Community College Innovation by Supporting Faculty Leadership](#)

A Public Agenda report on [Engaging Adjunct and Full-Time Faculty in Student Success Innovation](#)

A Public Agenda PowerPoint on [Engaging Adjunct and Full-Time Faculty in Student Success Innovation](#)

[Faculty Inquiry in the Context of Developmental Redesign: Experiences of Six Arkansas Community Colleges](#)

## SAMPLE AGENDAS AND MATERIALS FOR COVENINGS, SUMMITS, AND MEETINGS HOSTED BY THE SUCCESS CENTERS

[Arkansas Student Success Center Symposium](#) April 2012

[JFF's Summer State Policy Meeting](#) July 2013

[Michigan Center for Student Success Symposium](#) April 2012

[Michigan Student Success Applied Research Symposium PowerPoint](#) April 2012

[Michigan Student Success Summit](#) 2011

[New Jersey Faculty Summit on Learning Outcomes](#) October 2012

[New Jersey Student Success Summit: Revisioning Developmental Education](#) November 2012

[New Jersey Student Success Summit: Transforming Developmental Education](#) February 2013

[New Jersey Faculty Summit on Learning Outcomes](#) February 2013

[New Jersey Student Success Summit: Student Services](#) April 2013

[New Jersey Student Success Summit: ESL](#) April 2013

[Ohio Student Success Center Teacher's Retreat](#)

[Ohio Student Success Center Symposium: Moving Forward Together](#)

[Developmental Education Policy Implementation Matrix](#) provided by the Ohio Center for Student Success

[Guiding Questions for Campus Visits provided by the Ohio Center for Student Success](#)

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

## Examples of Student Success Center Initiatives

- Arkansas is developing an institutional model for student success, seeking to clearly identify the most promising evidence-based practices for its colleges, ranging from intrusive advising to student success courses and assessment test orientation.
- Michigan has launched a Faculty Leadership Initiative designed to identify and support “grassroots” faculty leaders through professional development for innovative instructional strategies, regional focus groups, and participation in statewide policy discussions.
- New Jersey partnered with the Association of Community College Trustees and the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas to offer the Governance Institute for Student Success to support the trustees’ role in student success.
- Ohio is implementing the English Project, which will scale up a three-prong strategy for improving developmental education outcomes in English composition through acceleration, cooperative learning and contextualization.
- Texas will organize its work around [leadership teams](#) comprised of college faculty, staff, and key partners focused on: measuring and funding student success; college readiness; transfer and articulation; workforce and skills alignment; Texans in community colleges; and professional development.

### ADDITIONAL PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST TO STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

[Michigan Student Success](#) Publications

[JFF’s Annotated Bibliography for Student Success Centers](#)

ground to discern learnings coming out of college practice that can inform a policy agenda to remove barriers and actively promote student success. In some states, systems change is an explicit role for the

Centers. In others, however, proactive policymaking has, historically, been shunned, and the colleges protect their autonomy. In those states, the Centers’ steps into articulating collective policy agendas can be contentious. But the student success movement has often highlighted opportunities for state policy to help colleges pursue their own goals, and also to scale proven practices that many believe all colleges should embrace. In a number of states, the Centers’ approach to policy is to engage a “coalition of the willing” among their college leaders. A group of college CEOs in New Jersey recently delivered a presentation during which they stated, “New Jersey presidents know that there is great power in collaboration,” and observed that “[we can] act collectively to create sustainable solutions—even though we aren’t ‘required’ to work together.”<sup>2</sup>

Some states also report a synergistic relationship between the historical advocacy role of the host associations and their new, success-focused Centers. The Centers bring added capacity and a laser-sharp focus on student success to policy discussions that had previously centered on buildings and budgets. The result is deeper college involvement in and more progress on important policy discussions related to topics such as transfer and college readiness.

The Arkansas Center for Student Success was key to the state’s winning a [2011 Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College & Career Training grant](#) for almost \$15 million.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON POLICY AND ADVOCACY

[Texas Success’ 5-Point Campaign](#)

JFF’s [Structured Pathways and Completion Policy Self-Assessment Tool](#)

JFF’s publication, [Cornerstones of Completion](#)



# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

## GENERAL RESOURCES ON DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

[Core Principles for Transforming Remedial Education: A Joint Statement](#)

JFF's publication, [Innovation at Scale: How Virginia Community Colleges Are Collaborating to Improve Developmental Education and Increase Student Success](#)

VCCS: [Innovating Developmental Education](#)

Success NC: [Developmental Education Initiative](#)

AACC: [Developmental Education Redesign Resources](#)

CCCS: [Developmental Education Task Force](#)

MDRC's publication, [Unlocking the Gate](#)

CCRC: [Scaling Innovation](#)

CCRC: [Developmental Education and Adult Basic Skills publications](#)

CCRC: [What We Know About Developmental Education Outcomes](#)

## An Overview of Student Success Centers

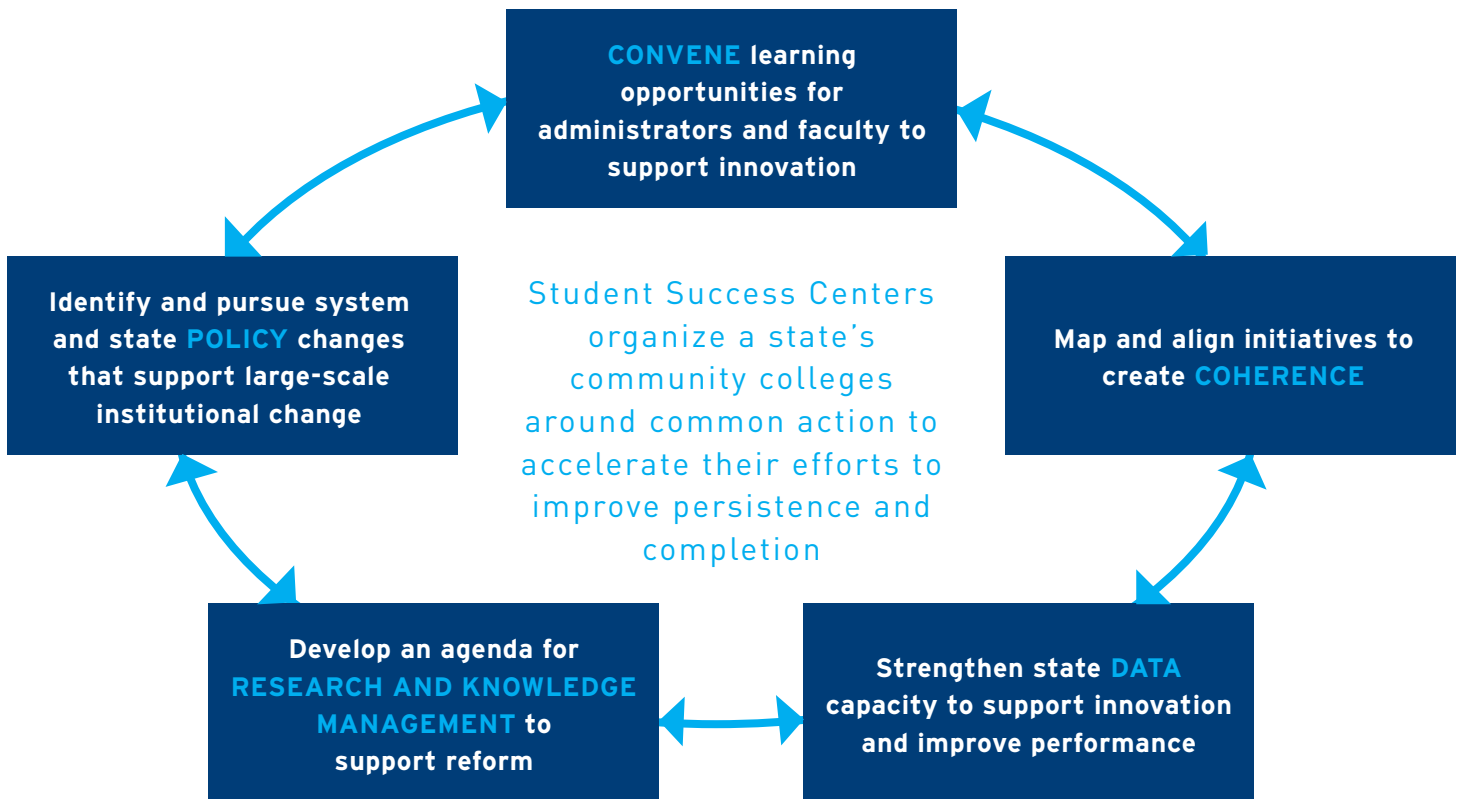
In collaboration with the Center directors and founders, Jobs for the Future crafted the following (see *Figure 2, on page 10, for a graphic representation*):

Student Success Centers organize a state's community colleges around common action to accelerate their efforts to improve persistence and completion. These Centers provide the vision, support, and a shared venue for a state's community colleges as they work in partnership on developing and implementing a collective student success agenda. The Centers take the lead in communicating the components of the broader completion agenda to college stakeholders and in building a cohesive approach to engagement, learning, and policy advocacy across a state's two-year institutions. Primary functions of the Centers include:

- **Convening and engagement:** bring colleges together around reform; develop faculty leadership; create in-state networks and communities of practice; advance cross-sector alignment and collaboration; attend national convenings
- **Student success coherence:** map and align student success initiatives; create an umbrella framework and marshal necessary resources to accelerate the completion agenda
- **Data:** improve data usage through work including metrics, sharing, transparency, coherence of metrics across initiatives, and increased IR capacity
- **Research and knowledge management:** develop newsletters, policy briefs, and overviews of college initiatives; identify and disseminate information on solid national models
- **Policy:** set agendas for systems and legislative change; build state capacity for reform; assist institutions with local policy audits and change

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

FIGURE 2.  
STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER STRATEGY & FRAMEWORK



The Centers also see **fundraising** as a key priority, to bring new initiatives and evidence-based innovations to the colleges and scale them across the state. The Arkansas Center for Student Success, for example, helped seven of its colleges secure state funding for the Arkansas College and Career Readiness Program, which supports college partnerships with local high schools to prepare students for college. The Center in Arkansas also was key to the state’s winning a 2011 Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College & Career Training (TAACCCT) grant for almost \$15 million.

The Centers play a critical **knowledge management** role. Many of the Centers have articulated a priority of developing a student success research agenda. To do so, staff seek to distill innovation and reform lessons learned at their state’s colleges and disseminate those lessons widely through convenings, newsletters, and

other publications—while supplementing that local experience with evidence and guidance from the ever-burgeoning national research base. Center staff note that this effort is incredibly time-consuming; staying on top of the research and finding relevant and interesting means of reducing down and presenting new findings on what works—rather than the laundry lists too often found in listservs and news feeds—is a significant challenge.

Building institutional capacity for data-driven decision making, a key theme in the national completion movement, is another priority for several Centers. Chris Baldwin, executive director of the Michigan

#### EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE AND GUIDANCE

MDRC and CCRC

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

Center for Student Success, suggested that at this time in Michigan, “the presidents want and need better evidence for what will work. And they need to share real data to get there.” So in Michigan, the Center has embraced a priority of helping the colleges build institutional research capacity and helping them see, across colleges, how to use and share data in ways that will improve student success.

## III. QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Student Success Centers are a relatively new phenomenon. As a result, there are still more questions than answers. Here are some of the most pressing questions for the future, many of which align with the questions and concerns facing many nonprofits, regardless of sector, such as governance, mission and funding.

### Does a State’s Community College Governance Structure Matter?

State governance is a hotly debated aspect of Student Success Centers. Though the Student Success Center model is not limited to decentralized states, the need for a sustainable vehicle for collective action and collaboration is often most apparent in states that lack a strong community college system office. Some argue, however, that states of all stripes can benefit from a non-state agency focused on aligning the multitude of student success initiatives underway.<sup>3</sup> For the moment at least, funding and activity to establish Student Success Centers seems to be concentrating first in decentralized states that articulate a clear need for a staffed entity that provides some coordination and coherence in the absence of a system office.

### What Type of Organization Can Serve as Host for a Student Success Center?

This question is inherently linked to the above question about governance. To date, Student Success Centers have all been founded in decentralized states without

a system office, and have all been hosted by statewide community college associations. Proponents of the model argue, however, that they can envision Centers hosted by other state intermediaries, including system offices, colleges, and other types of non-governmental education reform organizations.

Ultimately, a host organization of any kind would need to demonstrate certain characteristics and capacities to be an effective host, such as having the trust of the state’s community colleges and being able to access and convene college presidents, while simultaneously demonstrating a willingness to embrace a statewide student success agenda and providing the Center for Student Success with a degree of independence from the host’s agenda.

### Do the Centers Have Sufficient Freedom to Push for Bold Reform, Given Their Relationship to Their State Associations?

Center staff often walk a fine line, particularly in states where colleges value their autonomy. They have to reconcile competing opinions from college leaders, and strike a balance between pushing for student success and pulling colleges farther and faster than they are ready to go. Given that the Centers created thus far are embedded in statewide college associations, which have historically functioned as lobbying organizations, there is potential for conflict—a concern common to broader debates in the change literature over intermediaries and their role vis-à-vis funders and partners.<sup>4</sup> “There is a bit of inherent tension,” Caroline Altman Smith noted. “A Center needs to be a supportive space for connection and collaboration, but also serve as a critical friend to pressure colleges to stay focused on the student success agenda, and not get complacent.” Another interviewee commented that, “There is a push and a pull to what we do. We don’t have the authority for mandates, but we can build incentives—financial and otherwise—so we can push that way.”

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

At the time that the interviews for this publication were conducted, interviewees noted that conflict between Student Success Centers and the presidents who created them has been minimal and manageable. The commitment to the student success movement among institutional leaders has elevated some politically skilled champions in each state and given the Centers space to push the colleges outside of their comfort zone in the search for more effective strategies to improve student outcomes. Still, our interviewees are not naive. Their host associations are not strangers to the conflicts and tensions inherent in the work of managing competing agendas across multiple colleges. The leaders we interviewed are well aware that for Centers to be sustainable and strong advocates for reform over time, they must communicate well, build a supportive “coalition of the willing” among the state’s community college leaders, nurture strong relationships within and outside the community college sector, and maintain and continually reinforce their colleges’ trust.<sup>5</sup>

## The Student Success Center Network

With generous funding from The Kresge Foundation, Jobs for the Future manages the [Student Success Center Network](#). Jobs for the Future creates connective tissue between the existing Centers through: in-person convenings that allow Center directors to learn from each other and other experts; regular discussions and webinars on critical topics; access to the publications, tools, membership, and expertise of the [Postsecondary State Policy Network](#); and technical assistance including data support, agenda development, and in-state presentations.

## What Impact Are the Centers Having on Host Organizations?

A fascinating aspect of the Centers for Student Success is that their creation and maturation symbolize an

evolving mission for their host associations. “The Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges started, as all of them do, as a lobbying unit,” Mike Leach observed. “But it has branched out to supporting institutions in many ways. Student success is now a core part of the association’s mission.” In the same vein, Rey Garcia noted that the Texas Association of Community Colleges “had been strictly an advocacy organization, but we have transitioned into a more comprehensive organization,” with student success at the core.

## How Will Success be Measured?

What are the indicators of success for the Student Success Centers? This remains an open question. Thus far, the Centers are new and have not been rigorously, systematically evaluated over a long period of time. An evaluation of the first 18 months of the Michigan Center for Student Success studied indicators such as impact on stakeholders’ behavior, reach of communications, and value of policymaking and professional development activities.<sup>6</sup> As time marches on, champions and funders may grow eager to see results on student success indicators such as persistence and completion.

## What Does it Cost to Start and Run a Center?

We polled Center directors and founders on their operating costs, as well as their best estimates of the level of investment required for realistic (not optimal) start-up funding. Their estimates were surprisingly consistent, and average out to roughly:<sup>7</sup>

- Start up investments of approximately \$200,000-\$250,000; and
- [Operating budgets](#) of approximately \$300,000-\$350,000.

In each case, salary was the largest operating budget category. Center directors agreed that the other major budgeting categories were: expenses related to hosting

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

convenings; travel to in-state meetings, college visits and national conferences; consultants to extend capacity; and administration and overhead. Two of the Centers' budgets break down roughly into these categories:

Budget Category	Center A	Center B
Salary	60%	61%
Consultants	10%	7%
Meeting costs	15%	17.5%
Travel	6%	3.5%
Overhead and administration	9%	11%

## The Million Dollar Question: Can the Centers Generate Sustainable Funding?

All of the Student Success Centers thus far rely almost exclusively on grant funding; The Kresge Foundation has generously provided seed funding to many of them. This seed money is often a catalyst to local and regional funding to fill out Center budget needs. But the long-term plan is for the Centers to become self-sustaining, typically within about three years of founding. How to do so is a difficult question that is faced by most nonprofits. Underlying the question of sustainability is the sticky question of whether a previously grant-funded entity is providing sufficiently robust and valuable services that clients who formerly received services for free are willing to pay for them.<sup>8</sup> Center directors are thinking creatively. Options include:

- Prove the strong value of the Centers, and then increase the dues colleges already pay to host associations.
- Generate fee-for-service options, such as data support and purchasing cooperatives.
- Cover operating costs through institutional dues, but continue to rely upon grants to fund specific activities such as focused initiatives and convenings.
- Staff the Centers with faculty and staff on release time, paid for by the colleges, rotating through the colleges on a fixed schedule.

Ultimately, the most likely scenario is that Center budgets will be a mix of all of these—some sustained support from their colleges for both funding and staffing resources, plus revenues generated through delivery of some services, all supplemented by private funding for specific initiatives.

## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

### Early Advice from the Trenches for Other States Considering a Student Success Center

Student Success Centers seem to hold wide appeal. We asked the Center directors and founders their advice for others considering a similar model. In the words of Ron Abrams, it's about "process, process, process." Specific recommendations included:

Include faculty and engage them as much as you can.

- **Secure stable start-up funding:** Make sure the Centers have stable funding in the early stages, so the staff can do the hard launch work without having to focus exclusively on fundraising.
- **Hire the right staff:** Find a director who has both fundraising skills and a solid knowledge of community colleges and the completion movement and its agenda.
- **Go to the colleges:** Start by getting to know everyone. Go out to the colleges, meet administrative and faculty leaders, and get buy-in across the state.
- **Reach the faculty:** As more than one interviewee noted, "Include faculty and engage them as much as you can."
- **Engage stakeholders:** Bring as many people to the table as you can because "people support that which they helped to create."

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

- **Digest the research:** Stay on top of the national trends and research and convey the right information to the colleges about which reform strategies work, which show promise, and which might not have “legs.”
- **Know your context:** Be honest and realistic about what you can and cannot do.
- **Have fun:** Recognize that this work can and should be fun and energizing—it’s about the students and about doing things differently and better for large numbers of them.

## Recommendations for Existing and Newly Founded Student Success Centers

Based upon our interviews and interactions with Student Success Centers, Jobs for the Future makes the following recommendations:

- **Pay attention to process:** Starting a new entity requires a keen focus on laying the groundwork in smart ways, from conducting college visits, to ensuring strong and frequent communications, staying focused on the right priorities, and not getting stretched too thin.
- **Continue to focus on your state’s colleges and their needs:** The Centers have started on the right foot by systemically engaging their colleges, focusing first on those that see alignment between their own priorities and the Center’s agenda. That priority should remain front and center.
- **Build a coalition of the willing for courageous reforms:** The success of the student success movement depends upon colleges’ willingness to be bold. Not all colleges will be able to be courageous at all times, but Centers can identify and nurture the right actors for action at the right time, especially presidents who can champion statewide efforts.
- **Stay connected to the national movement and other states’ work:** A key driver of the national student success movement has been cross-state

sharing, learning, and catalysis; the Centers’ local relevance will be driven in part by their connection to the national conversation, research, and trends in both practice and policy innovation.

- **Engage third-party evaluators:** Everyone benefits from a critical friend. The Centers are a new concept, and both the Centers and the model need analysis of and guidance on their structures, processes and priorities.
- **Make sustainable funding a priority:** Ultimately, the success of the Centers will depend upon their ability to prove their value such that their colleges depend upon—and are willing to help fund—their continued existence.

## V. CONCLUSION

The Student Success Center model is gaining momentum. The Centers are filling a need in states that was identified by the colleges themselves; their emphasis on engagement means that they are creating grassroots support as they go. As one director noted, “I have thought for some time that this kind of capacity building in states is how the completion agenda will be sustained. The work has to get closer to the ground over time to be sustainable.” Another stated, “There is a real need to coordinate the student success work and there is a real need for someone to make it their responsibility to move it forward at some type of scale. The colleges aren’t going to do that.”

Existing Centers are showing some promising early successes and are building healthy relationships in their states. The Arkansas Center has met with impressive fundraising success, raising over \$17 million in grant funding for its colleges’ student success efforts since 2010. Center directors describe growing trust, burgeoning enrollments at convenings, and ever-increasing demands for their time and energy. In the words of one director, the colleges have begun to trust each other and voluntarily engage in cross-state policy discussions: “They have started to understand that we actually can create the benefits of a system even

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

though we are not one, and it doesn't have to be a legislative mandate." A college vice president from New Jersey described his support for the Center's mission in these terms: "As we shift the emphasis from access to success, it becomes increasingly important to develop strategies that enable students to achieve their goals and to realize their dreams. Our mission demands that we pursue those strategies."<sup>9</sup>

An interim evaluation of the Michigan Center for Student Success found overwhelmingly positive results.<sup>10</sup> Eighty percent of survey respondents were satisfied with the work of the Center and interviewees expressed support, even for the difficult pieces of the work. "The pressure on accountability is extremely valuable," said one interviewee. "The majority of us just need a little pressure to perform at peak." Respondents also appreciated the Center's role in providing a conduit for faculty and staff to participate in the student success agenda—an area that research has identified as a critical next step—with over 90 percent valuing networking opportunities with other community colleges and 88 percent valuing the Center's role in identifying strategies to support student success.<sup>11</sup> Another notable finding—given Michigan's highly decentralized environment—is that 81 percent of those surveyed said that "policy advocacy was a valuable activity for the Center." Michigan presidents also have recognized the Center's role in making the colleges' individual and collective efforts to improve student outcomes visible to policymakers. Though the directors and founders note that there are healthy questions about the Centers' roles, none of the Centers have encountered significant resistance—even in instances when host associations have come under fire—which is rather remarkable given the historically decentralized nature of many of these states.

Newer Centers have benefited from solid perceptions about the Centers among funders, and have been able to leverage The Kresge Foundation's investment for significant local dollars. In one endorsement of the concept, the advisory board for the new Texas Center

will include leaders with strong national reputations such as Dr. Richard Rhodes, president of Austin Community College, and Dr. Kay McClenney, director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement at The University of Texas at Austin.

Difficult questions remain, however. How will the Centers attract sustainable funding? Will they "push and pull" their colleges too far? Will colleges continue to build trust and common agendas, or will they become competitive with each other and pursue more particularist priorities? Will community colleges suffer too much from initiative fatigue to engage their Centers vigorously and make the most of their support?

Looking ahead, the Center directors are keenly aware that they have to remain focused and able to deliver concrete outcomes that the colleges value. Sustainability for the Centers means, in no uncertain terms, delivering a value proposition. Chris Baldwin noted that, "Moving forward, we need to start articulating a concise agenda for the Center. In the first two years we needed to build infrastructure and trust; now we are in a position to develop a point of view."

The oldest Center—the Arkansas Center for Student Success—is only three years old, so there is still a long road ahead. As the Centers mature, Jobs for the Future will continue to analyze and document the model as well as progress and challenges in hopes of better understanding this national trend toward small—but powerful—groups of people creating statewide impact. We look forward to disseminating this research and its implications for community college reform and improvement in the coming years.

A notable finding—given Michigan's highly decentralized environment—is that 81 percent of those surveyed said that "policy advocacy was a valuable activity for the Center."

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

## RESOURCE

TABLE 1.  
**CHARACTERISTICS OF EXISTING STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS**

STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER	FOUNDING DATE	HOST ORGANIZATION	PRIORITIES	STAFFING <sup>12</sup>
<p><b>Arkansas Center for Student Success</b></p> <p><a href="http://www.aatyc.org/student-success/center-for-student-success.html">www.aatyc.org/student-success/center-for-student-success.html</a></p>	<p>April 2010</p>	<p>Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better coordinate and establish synergies between existing student success initiatives, such as Achieving the Dream, Career Pathways, Arkansas Works, and others.</li> <li>• Coordinate the gathering and dissemination among all Arkansas two-year colleges of lessons learned and best practices from Achieving the Dream and other existing and new student success initiatives.</li> <li>• Seek federal, state, and private grant and other funding opportunities to expand proven initiatives and pilot new initiatives aimed at stimulating innovative practices to improve student success.</li> <li>• Coordinate the translation of learnings and best practices from all student success initiatives into state policy change, aggregate and present data (in policy briefs and reports) from all colleges for state policy change purposes, and advocate for specific policy changes.</li> </ul>	<p>1 FTE director</p> <p>1 FTE administrative support</p>



# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER	FOUNDING DATE	HOST ORGANIZATION	PRIORITIES	STAFFING
<b>Michigan Center for Student Success</b> <a href="http://www.mcca.org/content.cfm?m=47&amp;id=47">www.mcca.org/content.cfm?m=47&amp;id=47</a>	January 2011	Michigan Community College Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance existing and establish new student success communities of practice through the regular exchange of information at convenings and professional development opportunities.</li> <li>Promote innovation and continuous improvement through the appropriate collection and use of data and performance metrics.</li> <li>Develop a sustained student success research agenda based on the needs of Michigan community colleges and key issues correlated with improved student outcomes.</li> <li>Identify areas where collective, state-level policy action is warranted to enhance collaborative college efforts innovate toward improved student outcomes.</li> </ul>	1 FTE director 1 FTE associate director Part-time administrative position
<b>New Jersey Center for Student Success</b> <a href="http://www.njccc.org/center-for-student-success/">www.njccc.org/center-for-student-success/</a>	October 2012	New Jersey Council of County Colleges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the colleges through data-driven information so that campus administrators, faculty, and staff are making the most informed decisions.</li> <li>Build upon the already established foundation set by the academic priorities outlined in the New Jersey Council of County College's Big Ideas Initiative.</li> <li>Focus additionally on complementary student services initiatives that, when coupled with those of the Big Ideas project, will lead to a comprehensive student success program.</li> </ul>	1 FTE director
<b>Ohio Center for Student Success</b> <a href="http://www.ohiocommunitycolleges.org/public-page.php?s=student-success-center">http://www.ohiocommunitycolleges.org/public-page.php?s=student-success-center</a>	September 2012	Ohio Association of Community Colleges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help and support the colleges as they reform developmental education.</li> <li>Scale up evidence-based practices.</li> <li>Build institutional capacity for data-driven decision making.</li> </ul>	1 FTE director

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER	FOUNDING DATE	HOST ORGANIZATION	PRIORITIES	STAFFING
<b>Texas Success Center</b> <a href="http://www.tacc.org/pages/texas-success-center">http://www.tacc.org/pages/texas-success-center</a>	September 2013	Texas Association of Community Colleges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alignment of different innovation and success initiatives into a more coherent and comprehensive approach.</li> <li>Acceleration of learning across institutions so that adoption of proven or evidence-based initiatives can be accelerated and information costs reduced.</li> <li>Advocacy for policies that support the success agenda, in the legislature and in relevant state agencies.</li> </ul>	Planned staffing: 1 FTE director 1 FTE assistant director 1 FTE administrative staff .5 FTE part-time data staff

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

## RESOURCE LIST

### Overview of Student Success Centers

- Matrix of [Characteristics of Existing Student Success Centers](#)
- [Request for Proposals for New Student Success Centers](#), Issued by the Kresge Foundation and Jobs for the Future (also see [page 11](#))
- [Definition and Core Functions of Student Success Centers](#)
- [Joining Forces: How Student Success Centers Are Accelerating Statewide Community College Improvement Efforts](#). Jobs for the Future. October 2013.

### Communications

- [Building Statewide Capacity to Improve Student Success at Michigan Community Colleges](#)
- [Mission and Priorities from the New Jersey Center for Student Success](#)
- [Michigan Student Success Publications](#) (also see [page 10](#))
- [Local and National Studies from the New Jersey Center for Student Success](#) (also see [page 10](#))
- [Press Release: Expanding Student Success Centers in New \\$1.5 Million Grant, March 10, 2014](#)
- [Press Release: Jobs for the Future Receives \\$750,000 Grant from The Kresge Foundation to Support Network of Community College Student Success Centers, October 1, 2012](#)

### Staffing, Budgeting and Evaluation

#### Job Descriptions (also see [page 4](#))

- [Executive Director, Ohio Student Success Center](#)
- [Director, Arkansas Center for Student Success](#)
- [Executive Director, Texas Success Center](#)

#### Overview of Existing Center Budgets

- [Sample Student Success Center Budget](#) (also see [page 12](#))
- [Operating Budgets](#)

#### Evaluation of the Michigan Center for Student Success

- [Michigan Center for Student Success: Achievements and Challenges in the Early Years—An Interim Evaluation](#). Public Policy Associates, Incorporated. October 2012. (also see [page 15](#))

### Convenings and Faculty Engagement

#### Sample Agendas and Materials for Convenings, Summits, and Meetings (also see [page 7](#))

- [Arkansas Student Success Center Symposium](#) April 2012
- [JFF's Summer State Policy Meeting](#) July 2013
- [Michigan Center for Student Success Symposium](#) April 2012
- [Michigan Student Success Applied Research Symposium PowerPoint](#) April 2012
- [Michigan Student Success Summit](#) 2011
- [New Jersey Faculty Summit on Learning Outcomes](#) October 2012
- [New Jersey Student Success Summit: Revisioning Developmental Education](#) November 2012
- [New Jersey Student Success Summit: Transforming Developmental Education](#) February 2013
- [New Jersey Faculty Summit on Learning Outcomes](#) February 2013
- [New Jersey Student Success Summit: Student Services](#) April 2013
- [New Jersey Student Success Summit: ESL](#) April 2013

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

- [Ohio Student Success Center Teacher's Retreat PowerPoint](#)
- [Ohio Student Success Center Symposium: Moving Forward Together](#)
- [Guiding Questions for Campus Visits provided by the Ohio Center for Student Success](#)
- [Developmental Education Policy Implementation Matrix provided by the Ohio Center for Student Success](#)

## Faculty Engagement Resources *(also see [page 7](#))*

- [How States can Accelerate Community College Innovation by Supporting Faculty Leadership](#). Jobs for the Future. May 2012.
- [Cutting Edge Series: Engaging Adjunct and Full-time Faculty in Student Success Innovation](#). Public Agenda. May 2011.
- PowerPoint on [Engaging Adjunct and Full-Time Faculty in Student Success Innovation](#). Public Agenda. May 2011.
- [Faculty Inquiry in the Context of Developmental Redesign: Experiences of Six Arkansas Community Colleges](#). Asera, Rose. February 2014.
- [Faculty Inquiry Toolkit](#)

## Mapping and Aligning Completion Initiatives

- [Success NC: Student Success Framework](#) *(also see [page 6](#))*
- [Student Success Initiatives in Michigan](#) *(also see [page 6](#))*
- [Texas Student Success Council: Finding Common Ground to Increase Community College Completion](#). Jobs for the Future. February 2014.

- [Texas Success Center Initiatives and Programs](#) *(also see [page 6](#))*
- [The Achieving the Dream Student-Centered Model of Institutional Improvement](#) *(also see [page 6](#))*

## Policy and Advocacy

- [Texas Success: Five Point Campaign](#) *(also see [page 8](#))*
- [Structured Pathways and Completion Policy Self-Assessment Tool](#). Jobs for the Future. October 2013. *(also see [page 8](#))*
- [Cornerstones of Completion: State Policy Support for Accelerated, Structured Pathways, to College Credentials and Transfer](#). Jobs for the Future. December 2012. *(also see [page 8](#))*

## Further Resources of Interest

- [Student Success Center Orientation Materials: Annotated Bibliography](#). Jobs for the Future. 2013. *(also see [page 8](#))*
- [Autonomy and Innovation: Systemic Change in a Decentralized State](#). Jobs for the Future and Michigan Center for Student Success. October 2012.
- [Continuous Improvement for College Completion: Arkansas Builds a System-Level Strategy for Community College Student Success](#). Achieving the Dream. February 2014.
- [Completion by Design Pathway Analyses Toolkit](#). 2014. *(also see [page 10](#))*
- [Thinking Big: A Framework for States on Scaling Up Community College Innovation](#). Jobs for the Future. July 2013. *(also see [page 6](#))*

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

**General Resources on Developmental Education** (also see [page 9](#))

- [Core Principles for Transforming Remedial Education: A Joint Statement](#). Jobs for the Future, Charles A. Dana Center, Education Commission of the States and Complete College America. December 2012.
- [Innovation at Scale: How Virginia Community Colleges Are Collaborating to Improve Developmental Education and Increase Student Success](#). Jobs for the Future. October 2011.
- [Virginia's Community Colleges: Developmental Education](#)
- [North Carolina Community Colleges: Developmental Education Initiative](#)
- [AACC: Developmental Education Redesign-Resources for Community Colleges](#)
- [Colorado Community College System: Developmental Education Task Force](#)
- [Unlocking the Gate: What We Know About Improving Developmental Education](#). MDRC. June 2011.
- [CCRC: Scaling Innovation](#)
- [CCRC: Developmental Education and Adult Basic Skills](#)
- [Research Overview: What We Know About Developmental Education Outcomes](#). CCRC. January 2014.

# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Hilliard 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Mora et al. 2013.

<sup>3</sup> There are complementary debates over governance in higher education and the impact of centralization vs. decentralization. See, for example, Hearn & McLendon 2011; MacTaggart 1996; and Richardson et al. 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Giloth 2004; Shea 2011; Gateway Center for Giving 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, since the interviews for this publication were conducted, the Ohio Association of Community Colleges has gone through changes, including the retirement of former CEO Ron Abrams, that may result in new priorities and focus for Ohio's Student Success Center.

<sup>6</sup> Public Policy Associates 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Texas estimates are excluded from this analysis. Texas is a large state with 50 community college districts; the Texas Center's costs are an outlier compared to peer states.

<sup>8</sup> For discussions of nonprofit funding models and sustainability, please see Kim, Perreault & Foster 2011; Foster, Kim, & Christiansen 2009; Giloth 2004.

<sup>9</sup> "Center for Student Success," New Jersey Council of County Colleges, Accessed July 30, 2013, <http://www.njccc.org/center-for-student-success/success-stories/>

<sup>10</sup> Public Policy Associates 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Altstadt 2012; Rutschow et al. 2011; Achieving the Dream & Public Agenda 2011.

<sup>12</sup> All of the Student Success Centers extend their capacity through interns, consultants, etc. This column represents only the full-time staff of the Centers.

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# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

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