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Press Release

SREB News



Contact

[Beth Day](#), SREB
Communications Director,
(404) 879-5544

[Dave Spence](#), SREB
President, or [Cheryl
Blanco](#), Vice President for
Postsecondary Education,
(404) 875-9211

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The Southern Regional
Education Board
[Community College
Commission](#) was charged
with recommending ways
to strengthen the role of
community colleges in
raising educational
attainment in Southern
states. The Commission
met during 2013 and
2014 and publishes
recommendations in the
report [Community
Colleges in the South:
Strengthening Readiness
and Pathways](#).

*The Southern Regional
Education Board works
with states to improve*

Community Colleges in the South

Commission Calls for Readiness Reforms, Clear Pathways

Education and policy leaders recommend reforms to help community college students move down a well-defined path to degrees and careers.

Atlanta, Georgia, April 15, 2015 — SREB's

Community College Commission calls for states to reform college placement, reconsider math and literacy requirements, and carefully monitor students who need developmental (remedial) courses. The Commission report proposes firm guidance along structured pathways where students clearly see entry, exit and re-entry points to continue their education.

The recommendations also ask states to commit increased funding and hold community colleges accountable for improving student services and completion of degrees and certificates.

As the most affordable, accessible way for high school graduates to continue education and adults to retool for new careers, [community colleges](#) are states' best bet to close opportunity gaps for low-income students and those who would be the first in their

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public education at every level, from pre-K through Ph.D. A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization based in Atlanta, SREB was created in 1948 by Southern governors and legislatures to advance education and improve the social and economic life of the region. SREB member states are Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.



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families to attend college. Yet, the Commission notes, community colleges lack the resources to serve these roles as well as states need. Too few students complete degrees and certificates or transfer to four-year colleges.

“Our ambitious goals for postsecondary completion demand that we focus our attention on community colleges now,” said SREB President Dave Spence. “If states do not improve the performance of community colleges — which enroll almost half of undergraduate students and the majority of those least likely to earn a degree — we will miss the mark.”

[Community Colleges in the South: Strengthening Readiness and Pathways](#) offers 21 recommendations for states and community colleges.

Protect affordability

Affordability — one of the most important merits of community colleges — is jeopardized as two-year colleges have raised tuition in recent years, often to offset state funding declines. The budget squeeze means fewer low-income students can attend and more families accumulate higher debt.

Link to K-12

Community colleges should work more closely with local high schools to help get more graduates ready for credit-bearing courses. Students should see a natural pathway that motivates them from high school through community college to careers and four-year degrees. And colleges must provide concrete and consistent information about the literacy and math skills students need to succeed in college.

“Nationally, more than half of community college students are assigned to at least one developmental education course their first year,” said Commission Co-Chair Joe Pickens, president of St. Johns River

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State College in Florida. This is the biggest factor in whether they graduate, and we have to work together to better prepare them for college work.”

Maximize transfer

Too many students lose credit hours when they move from one college to another, which costs them money and slows or halts their path to degree. States need systems that guarantee transfer for freshman- and sophomore-level courses among all state institutions. The report offers specific policy strategies and examples from Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky and Louisiana.

“Students need pathways through college that are efficient — and connect them to great job opportunities in their community and state,” said Commission Co-Chair Tim Shaughnessy, associate provost for academic affairs at Gateway Community & Technical College in Kentucky.

Add value to the GED

Teaching GED (General Education Development) test preparation in the context of specific careers or occupational skills paves the way for upward mobility. The report cites “contextualized GED” initiatives in North Carolina, Virginia and elsewhere that have helped GED earners move on to community college and other postsecondary study.

Community Colleges in the South: Strengthening Readiness and Pathways

[Full report >](#)

[Executive summary >](#)

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