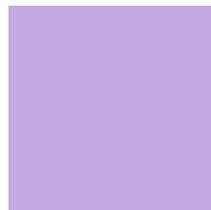
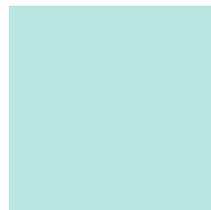
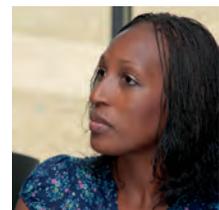




Increasing Opportunities for Immigrant Students: Community College Strategies for Success

by Jill Casner-Lotto

Executive Summary



The Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education

The Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education (CCCIE) is a national network of 23 community colleges and other professional and research organizations that have joined forces to increase educational and workforce opportunities for immigrant students. CCCIE's mission is to 1) increase national awareness of the role of community colleges in immigrant education and 2) support the work of community colleges to strengthen and expand services for immigrant students including English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, college readiness, college completion, career readiness, and employment and advancement. We believe that ensuring educational access and success for immigrants and children of immigrants is critical to increasing U.S. college completion and workforce readiness.

National in scope, CCCIE receives financial support from the J.M. Kaplan Fund and is supported and hosted by Westchester Community College in Valhalla, New York. CCCIE's work is guided by a Blue Ribbon Panel of community college leaders and experts in the field of immigrant education. Our key activities include: raising national visibility of immigrant education challenges and opportunities, sharing promising practices, and providing advocacy and outreach on critical education and career issues that impact immigrants at all skill levels.

Community College Consortium
for Immigrant Education
E-mail: info@cccie.org
Phone: 914-606-7866

Contact us!

CCCIE is eager to expand its membership and share resources to strengthen and expand programs for immigrant students. We invite your comments and feedback to this report and encourage you to join our mailing list, connect with an expert, share your resources, or submit a promising practice for review. Visit our website at www.cccie.org or contact us directly at info@cccie.org. We can connect you with the people and programs that can help start or advance a community college initiative to increase opportunities for immigrant students.

2011-2012 Blue Ribbon Panel Members

Alamo Community College District, TX
American Association of Community Colleges, D.C.
Bluegrass Community and Technical College, KY
Bunker Hill Community College, MA
City College of San Francisco, CA
City University of New York
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Community
Colleges, NY
Johnson County Community College, KS
LaGuardia Community College, NY
Literacywork International, NM
Miami Dade College, FL
Migration Policy Institute, D.C.
Montgomery College, MD
National Community College Hispanic Council, CA
Northern Virginia Community College, VA
Palm Beach State College, FL
Pima Community College, AZ
Queensborough Community College, NY
Rio Hondo College, CA
South Texas College, TX
Washington State Board for Community and
Technical Colleges, WA
Westchester Community College, NY
Wilbur Wright College, IL
World Education Services, NY

Download the full report at:
www.cccie.org

Executive Summary

Community colleges serve as critical gateways for educating and training America's growing and increasingly diverse immigrant and refugee population. They provide an ideal venue for educating immigrants by offering English language instruction, academic and vocational programs, job skills training, civics education, and a range of academic, employment, and social support services. Providing access to higher education for immigrants is crucial not only for their personal success, but for the economic and cultural vibrancy of local communities and the country as well.

Yet many colleges today struggle to provide and sustain programs that effectively meet the needs of immigrants. This report examines the innovative strategies and promising practices of community colleges belonging to the Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education (CCCIE). This national network of 23 colleges, professional groups, and research organizations is committed to increasing opportunities for immigrant students, and expanding immigrant education and training programs among community colleges across the country.

The report describes a Framework for Supporting Immigrant Student Success that identifies 11 key factors contributing to the innovative practices of CCCIE colleges. It also includes case study examples drawn from their experiences. The examples illustrate that CCCIE colleges are moving beyond isolated pilot projects to adopt a strategic approach that: successfully aligns immigrant education initiatives with other programs and departments, makes improvements at all organizational levels, and coordinates resources to serve immigrant students. While no one college is doing this perfectly, CCCIE colleges are committed to continuously improve their programs and initiatives.

The promising practices described in this report demonstrate how colleges are developing programs that align with the specific needs of their communities. There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to the design of innovative immigrant education and training programs. But there are valuable lessons to be learned as colleges overcome challenges and open opportunities for significant change in the lives and economic prospects of immigrants and refugees.

Supporting Immigrant Students: A Critical National Imperative

As the population ages and millions of baby boomers retire, immigrants and their children will account for much of the U.S. population and labor force growth over the next few decades. According to one estimate, immigrants and their children are expected to account for all workforce growth over the next 20 years. By 2030, nearly one in five U.S. workers will be an immigrant.¹ Ensuring educational access and success for the immigrant population is critical to increasing U.S. college completion, improving workforce readiness, and sustaining the nation's productivity in a highly competitive global economy. The immigrant population represents enormous potential, but significant challenges lie ahead to ensure that the potential is properly developed. Community colleges are well positioned to be critical change agents in this development.

¹B. Lindsay Lowell, Julia Gelatt, and Jeanne Batalova, *Immigrants and Labor Force Trends: The Future, Past and Present*, 2006. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 4, 6, http://www.migrationpolicy.org/ITFIAF/TF17_Lowell.pdf

Note: This report focuses primarily on "immigrant students" who left their country and intend to settle permanently in the United States, as opposed to "international students" who attend college with a student visa and intend to return to their country of origin. The term "immigrant" also includes refugees and those seeking asylum.

Challenges for Immigrant Students

In several ways, immigrant students share similar characteristics and face the same struggles as other community college students. Many are older non-traditional students who attend college part-time while juggling jobs and families. They often come from low-income backgrounds, experience turbulence in their lives, and have a difficult time marshaling the financial resources to pay college fees and tuition. Immigrant students also face unique challenges and needs as they learn a new language, navigate unfamiliar community college systems and community services, and acclimate to a totally new culture—all at the same time. Consider the following:

- Immigrant students who arrive in this country with low levels of education must acquire language and literacy skills (in English and, in some cases, in their native language) and fill gaps in academic knowledge. Many fail to progress through the necessary English as a Second Language (ESL) levels before reaching college-level programs. Those who progress through a series of ESL classes tend to lag in their reading comprehension, a gap largely resulting from limited vocabulary.
- In addition to navigating the community college system, immigrant students are tackling numerous tasks to get settled in a new country: finding housing and understanding rental agreements, enrolling their children in school, applying for a driver's license (if they have a car), locating medical care, getting legal help, navigating social services, or applying for jobs.
- Immigrant students growing up in linguistically isolated neighborhoods and speaking a language other than English at home may be behind their English-speaking peers. While bilingualism can be a benefit in many ways, the students' lack of exposure to both everyday English and academic discourse can create a disadvantage. This applies to both U.S.-born immigrants (Generation 1.5) and foreign-born students.
- Late entry, nontraditional immigrant students who come to community colleges from the adult education system (or from adult basic education/ESL programs within the college) are typically unprepared for the vocational training and academic rigor of community colleges and lack the skills of their English-speaking peers.
- Undocumented students who may have gone through high school unaware of their status, may be too afraid to identify themselves and unlikely to access community college systems.** Financial aid is often the biggest barrier, since undocumented students are not eligible for Pell Grants. However, they may be eligible for private scholarships and state aid in some states, but are often unaware of available resources.
- Internationally educated, high-skilled immigrants may lack the level of English language proficiency to re-enter careers in this country and face complex re-credentialing processes. They often lack the cultural knowledge about the professional world in the U.S. and may not know how to navigate professional networks. Despite their education and training, many remain unemployed or significantly underemployed.

Challenges for Community Colleges

Community colleges are well positioned to serve an increasingly diverse immigrant population, but they face significant challenges, including supporting and sustaining immigrant education programs with limited funds. Colleges must find ways to improve the learning gains of students entering non-credit ESL instruction and accelerate their transition to college-level programs. While a promising alternative to the traditional sequential approach is contextualized ESL instruction that assures both English language proficiency and preparation for college-level work or career training, the contextualized model is not easy or inexpensive to implement. The

* Generation 1.5 students most often include those who were born in this country but have grown up speaking a language other than English at home and in their communities. They share characteristics of both first and second generation immigrants but may not fall into traditional categories of ESL students.

** Several states have passed laws that provide undocumented youth access to a public college or university, including eligibility for in-state tuition.

increased academic rigor of contextualized ESL often requires comprehensive support services to help students keep on track, and a high degree of coordination among various college departments and outside community partners is needed to make this work.

Other critical issues include: expanding ESL classroom capacity to meet demand, which, in turn, increases the need for more well-qualified ESL instructors; scheduling classes that can accommodate students' work schedules and family responsibilities; and providing differentiated ESL curricula and career pathways to accommodate the various English proficiency and educational levels of immigrant students. More comprehensive assessment procedures that reflect immigrant students' unique needs and strengths are a key prerequisite to developing more targeted curricula and student support.

Community colleges working alone cannot provide the comprehensive menu of services that immigrant students require to succeed in college. The colleges profiled in this report have found ways to support their initiatives often through a mix of private and public sector funds and by effectively leveraging resources through multi-sector partnerships. Multi-sector partnerships are critical to the success and sustainability of immigrant education and training initiatives.

The following framework is intended as a guide to help community colleges develop a strategy for launching and expanding innovative immigrant education practices.

A Framework for Supporting Immigrant Student Success: 11 Key Factors

- 1. Executive-level commitment and follow-through.** Community college leaders demonstrate their commitment by articulating a clear vision and strategy for serving immigrant students and by developing resources to turn the vision into reality. Programs are strengthened by linking immigrant education program goals to the overall college mission and strategic plan, building the organizational capacity for innovation, and facilitating the cross-departmental collaborations and community partnerships needed to successfully implement strategies at the ground level.
- 2. Proactive outreach and a welcoming campus environment.** Proactive outreach leads to increased access and success for immigrant students. Community colleges reach out to public school systems, community agencies, and local businesses to teach staff, potential students, and parents about resources available to immigrants, and to help them use these services. Proactive outreach is particularly critical in the case of undocumented students who often lack access to available resources. Colleges are providing scholarship funds, connecting students with legal and financial resources, and working with student groups that actively support the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act.
- 3. A community-wide needs analysis.** Understanding the changes in local demographics is critical to ensuring that college services align with the community's needs. The innovative programs that serve immigrant students are often preceded by a community needs analysis that captures labor market information, demographics, and specific immigration trends. This information allows the community college to respond through effective program design, curriculum development, and outreach.
- 4. The redesign of ESL programs.** Colleges are rethinking and redesigning how and where ESL is taught. They are increasing the flexibility of class schedules and location, the alignment of non-credit and credit coursework, and the use of technology/multimedia-based programs. The traditional paths and delivery of ESL instruction are restructured to include a contextualized or content-based approach that accelerates the transition to a college degree or certificate program, vocational training, and careers, and offers a continuum of support services. Leading-edge colleges are designing more targeted and differentiated ESL programs to meet the needs of an increasingly heterogeneous immigrant student body.

The redesign of ESL programs transforms the way colleges operate because it is breaking down “ESL silos” and encouraging greater collaboration among ESL, academic, workforce development, and student services departments.

5. Comprehensive and culturally sensitive assessment of immigrant student needs.

Assessment plays a pivotal role in immigrant education programs. When done well, it enables colleges to develop more effective and tailored responses. Traditional assessment processes, which rely heavily on standardized testing for class placement, have worked poorly for immigrant students. As an alternative, colleges are implementing more comprehensive assessment measures that use diverse approaches to measure proficiency, address cultural differences, and capture the full picture of immigrant students’ unique needs and strengths.

6. A holistic, integrated approach to student support services. Support services for immigrant students deploy an integrated approach that serves the “whole student,” in recognition of the academic and non-academic support services that often exceed customary assistance and counseling. Colleges are providing an integrated approach to immigrant student services through such ways as building ambassador-type relationships in the community, increasing coordination and centralization of services, and developing multi-sector partnerships that provide a continuum of support services.

7. Focus on immigrant education outcomes, evaluation, and sharing results. Colleges are increasingly collecting data on key variables that measure immigrant student progress in conjunction with student intent, and are using data to improve immigrant education programs and services. The programs are monitoring students’ educational and employment gains, and are showing quantitative improvements in enrollments, class performance, and certificate and/or degree completion. While employment outcomes are more difficult to track, some programs report increased job placements, promotions, and earnings. Colleges that forge strong partnerships between their ESL programs and institutional research departments, and that affiliate with third-party evaluators and national college completion initiatives, are making gains.

8. ESL faculty professional development and participation in program design. Community colleges are adopting various strategies to increase the supply of qualified ESL instructors and improve their opportunities for professional development, such as training high-quality ESL instructors to meet demand, encouraging faculty to help design ESL curricula, and developing teamwork among ESL, basic skills, academic and vocational skills faculty, and student services staff.

9. Development of immigrant student leadership skills. Community colleges that intentionally provide resources and involve immigrant students in campus life build leadership and advocacy skills and help students to become motivated, active partners in learning. A diverse immigrant student body enhances both classroom and extracurricular life for all students. Colleges help students develop leadership skills through their support for advocacy efforts, student government initiatives, and student clubs that promote immigrant integration. Colleges also provide opportunities for immigrant students to help each other, and the communities in which they live, through peer-to-peer mentoring, learning communities, and service learning.

10. Meaningful, multi-sector partnerships. Community colleges have developed diverse partnerships with various stakeholders including K-12 schools, four-year colleges, adult education systems, community- and faith-based organizations, employers, and workforce investment boards. The most successful community college partnerships serving immigrant students share several characteristics including an emphasis on: regular, face-to-face communications to build relationships and trust among staff members; effective management and leveraging of each partner’s resources and strengths; and a willingness of community colleges to entertain new ideas for serving immigrant students—even when those ideas come from outside academic circles.

11. Emphasis on program replication and bringing best models to scale. The CCCIE Blue Ribbon Panel (BRP) is committed to sharing promising practices and scaling up the best ESL and immigrant education models at their own campuses and at other colleges. Among the steps they are taking: sponsoring peer learning communities, offering faculty “train the trainer” workshops, and providing technical assistance to other community colleges and community groups. Several BRP members and their partner organizations also participate in national initiatives designed to strengthen and replicate programs for underserved community college students and low-wage workers—many of whom are immigrants.

Recommendations for Action

We urge community college leaders and practitioners to use this report and the framework to start conversations and take action with key decision makers and stakeholders to develop a strategic plan that addresses the unique challenges and opportunities represented by the growing immigrant population. This is critical to the nation’s future economic growth. Colleges can benefit by reflecting upon and accessing how their own programs and services compare with each of the 11 key success factors described in the framework.

Recommendations for action for community colleges are offered in four broad categories:

- Developing an immigrant education strategy
- Building a community of supporters
- Redesigning ESL instruction and career pathways
- Empowering immigrant students as leaders

Policymakers and funders can play a valuable role in helping community colleges adopt strategies that better serve immigrants at all skill levels. Policies and resources that support workforce and education efforts for immigrants support critical national goals to improve economic growth, educational attainment, and college completion.

Recommendations for policymakers in the following key areas include:

- Reauthorizing and improving the alignment of the Workforce Investment Act Title I (workforce training) and Title II (adult education and literacy) to encourage integrated ESL, job training, and career pathways for all immigrants
- Revising financial aid policy to allow support for noncredit ESL
- Providing access to college and financial aid for all students
- Improving the quality of national demographic data collected on immigrant students
- Increasing government collaboration to improve programs and services for immigrant students

Areas for public and private investment include:

- Supporting community colleges’ outreach initiatives to increase educational accessibility for immigrant families
- Funding public awareness campaigns to inform community members about the contributions of immigrants and the role of community colleges in educating immigrants
- Supporting high quality research to expand the field of immigrant education and training
- Increasing opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, technical assistance, and collaborative research among community colleges and partner organizations

A Framework for Supporting Immigrant Student Success: 11 Key Factors

1. **Executive-level commitment and follow-through** drive successful outcomes.
2. **Proactive outreach and a welcoming campus environment** improve college access and success.
3. **A community-wide needs analysis** that captures specific immigration trends, local demographics, and labor market information aligns college services with community needs.
4. **Redesigned English as a Second Language (ESL) programs** enhance learning and job placement. Initiatives include increased flexibility; ESL instruction and career pathways specifically matched to students' existing English proficiency and educational levels; a contextualized approach that accelerates the transition to college or a career; and integration of technology to extend learning beyond the classroom.
5. **Comprehensive and culturally sensitive assessment** equips colleges to address immigrant students' needs and builds on their strengths.
6. **A holistic, integrated approach to student support services** utilizes cross-departmental collaboration and community partnerships to provide both academic and non-academic resources and ensure student engagement.
7. **A focus on outcomes, evaluation, and sharing data** allows colleges to improve and expand immigrant education programs.
8. **ESL faculty professional development and participation in curriculum design** builds support and contributes to the development of high-quality, innovative ESL programs.
9. **Development of immigrant student leadership skills** motivates learning and promotes student integration into campus life and U.S. culture.
10. **Meaningful, multi-sector partnerships** with various stakeholders increase students' college and career readiness, and facilitates their transition to higher education and jobs.
11. **An emphasis on program replication and bringing best models to scale** strengthens the capacity of community colleges to improve educational and training opportunities.

Source: *Increasing Opportunities for Immigrant Students: Community College Strategies for Success*, Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, 2011.