

# INTRODUCTION

## The Stakes Are High

By 2020, 65 percent of all new jobs in the United States will require at least some postsecondary education and training.<sup>1</sup> Community colleges are a critical part of the education pipeline to meet the demands of a 21st century economy and open the doors of opportunity to all citizens. There is considerable momentum behind efforts to increase access to community colleges by more clearly communicating the value of a community college education and removing financial barriers, but increasing access alone is not sufficient. Unless community colleges put as much energy into increasing college readiness, they will not be successful.

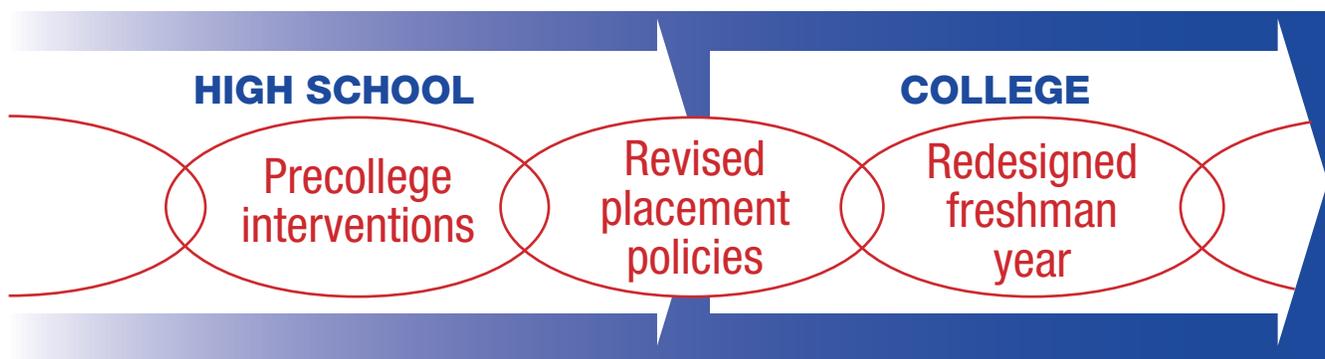
Why? Because remediation rates are high, and students who take remedial courses do poorly. A study using national data found that 58 percent of recent high school graduates who entered community colleges took at least one developmental course. Only about one-quarter of these students (28 percent) went on to earn any degree or certificate within 8.5 years.<sup>2</sup> In some of our institutions, the need for remediation is much higher and the success rates much lower. Despite efforts to support them, most underprepared students will not complete a degree. In a recent national study, of the students who needed remedial education courses as freshmen, fewer than one out of 10 graduated with a postsecondary credential.<sup>3</sup>

The good news is there is a golden opportunity if colleges capitalize on it now. K–12 is raising standards to ensure that students are held to more rigorous academic expectations. High schools are poised to use the new standards to both accelerate students who are ready for college-level coursework while in high school and deliver extra support for students who need it to be ready for college-level coursework by the time they graduate from high school. New statewide assessments capable of measuring college readiness are providing information to determine whether a student is on track to being college and career ready while in high school. But K–12 cannot close the preparation gap without help. Community colleges have a clear role to play and a short window for presidents and trustees to step up.

This paper frames the opportunity and lays out a series of action steps community college presidents and boards of trustees can take to seize the moment. It focuses on three areas of policy and practice that directly affect the success of students prior to their leaving high school and creates a clear pathway into community colleges and ultimately to a certificate or degree:

- ◆ **Providing precollege interventions to help students become ready for college by the time they graduate from high school,** including collaboration with K–12 school districts to design 12th grade bridge courses and support programs based on areas of student need revealed through the new college-ready assessments.
- ◆ **Revising placement policies and practices to put incoming community college students into appropriate courses and, consequently, on a path toward persistence and completion.** This includes using the new high school assessments and other measures to determine if entering students are ready for credit-bearing college courses.
- ◆ **Redesigning first-year experiences to support students' transitions into credit-bearing coursework and reduce time to a degree.** Efforts include establishing default course schedules for each program of study, providing customized and co-requisite remediation, improving advising and academic planning, and scheduling classes in more cohesive and convenient blocks.

## CREATING A CLEAR PATHWAY INTO COLLEGE



### What Community College Presidents and Trustees Can Do

The American Association of Community Colleges, the Association of Community College Trustees, and Higher Ed for Higher Standards are calling on community college leaders nationwide to take the following actions to close the preparation gap:

- 1. Partner with K–12 leadership** to bring more substantial college readiness supports and interventions into the high schools. These supports and interventions should include 12th grade bridge courses and summer programs for students who are not yet college ready and dual enrollment and other acceleration strategies for those who are.
- 2. Identify college readiness measures** that can trigger supports in high school, signaling aligned expectations between K–12 and colleges. Engage college and high school English and mathematics faculty to develop/ recommend a clear policy that defines readiness for credit-bearing coursework based on high school assessment results and other measures of student academic performance.
- 3. Revise institutional placement practices** to honor college-ready achievement by students on these new measures, thus enabling students to enroll directly in credit-bearing coursework in their freshman year if they have met standards in high school.
- 4. Provide first-year students** who are not yet college ready with **co-requisite and other evidence-based remediation opportunities** as well as guided pathways to support their success.
- 5. Work with system leaders and policymakers** to adopt statewide policies that encourage these practices.