

Contact:

Jill Casner-Lotto—914-606-5644

Teresita B. Wisell—914-606-7866

Email: info@cccie.org

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IMMIGRANT STUDENTS GAIN IMPORTANT SKILLS FOR COLLEGE AND JOB SUCCESS

Community Colleges Develop Strategies for Launching & Expanding Innovative Immigrant Education Programs, Says New CCCIE Report

January 13, Valhalla, New York—The Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education (CCCIE) has released a new report, *Increasing Opportunities for Immigrant Students: Community College Strategies for Success*, which illustrates how CCCIE member colleges are improving educational and employment outcomes for immigrant students, including increased accessibility, affordability, college degree or certificate completion, and job placements. The report provides numerous case study examples of community colleges across the nation and also offers recommendations for actions and investment for community college leaders and practitioners, policymakers, and funders. The full report and an executive summary are available at www.cccie.org.

Community colleges that have launched and expanded English as a Second Language, academic, and career training programs note that their initiatives address community- or region-wide skills shortages in such fields as healthcare and green jobs. College leaders recognize the contributions of immigrants to their communities' economic growth and cultural diversity, the report notes.

And on a national scale, "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," the report states. "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."

A Diverse Immigrant Student Body

The colleges profiled in the report are located in various parts of the country and range from large community colleges in the nation's major cities to smaller suburban campuses. The colleges serve an increasingly diverse group of immigrant students, in terms of English language proficiency, educational and skill levels, and country of origin. Students range from those with both limited language and literacy skills (in English and in their native languages) who lack high school diplomas to college-educated immigrants who have earned degrees and credentials in their home countries and have years of professional experience, but lack the English language skills and cultural knowledge to reenter careers and often face significant roadblocks in obtaining U.S. recognition for their foreign credentials.

"At both ends of the educational spectrum and from various walks of life—whether an incoming high school student, a doctor, a nurse, engineer, migrant worker, or political refugee—immigrants turn to community colleges to help them further their education, prepare for citizenship, or launch new careers," the report notes. Many immigrants served by community colleges come from low-income backgrounds and include older adult students juggling work and family responsibilities, learning a new language, navigating unfamiliar educational systems and community services, and acclimating to a totally new culture—all at the same time.

"The report draws attention to the unique challenges faced by immigrant students and the community colleges that serve them, and it shows that, even with limited resources and in a difficult economic environment, innovative and replicable approaches to immigrant education and workforce training at the community college level are possible," notes CCCIE Executive Director Teresita B. Wisell, who also serves as Associate Dean and Director of The Gateway Center at Westchester Community College in Valhalla, New York, where CCCIE is located. The colleges included in the report support programs often through a mix of private and public funds and by effectively leveraging resources

through multi-sector partnerships that are “critical to the success and sustainability of immigrant education and training initiatives.” Colleges have collaborated with community-based organizations, k-12 schools, four-year colleges, adult education systems, employers, and workforce investment boards.

Critical Factors for Immigrant Student Success

The report describes a Framework for Supporting Immigrant Student Success, which identifies 11 key factors that contribute to the innovations and promising practices at CCCIE colleges, according to the report’s author CCCIE Director Jill Casner-Lotto. Among the key factors: executive-level commitment and follow-through; proactive community outreach; redesign of ESL career pathways that accommodate immigrants’ different educational and skill skills, integrate new technologies, and increase flexibility; multi-sector partnerships; ESL faculty professional development; and development of immigrant student leadership skills.

“While CCCIE colleges—as well as other community colleges—are making significant inroads in serving immigrant students, there have been few opportunities to share the most promising practices...and discuss the most difficult challenges,” she notes. Among the challenges cited: sustaining programs with limited funds, and expanding ESL classroom capacity to meet demand. “The framework is intended as a catalyst to start conversations with key stakeholders and help community colleges implement a strategic plan for launching and expanding innovative immigrant education practices,” says Casner-Lotto.

“We believe that the issues of immigrant education—and the role that community colleges can and do play—have not received enough attention at the national policy level or in higher education reform efforts,” said Wisell. “Community colleges are well positioned to be critical change agents in developing the tremendous potential of the immigrant population.”

CCCIE (www.cccie.org) is a national network of 23 community colleges, professional groups, and research organizations committed to expanding and strengthening programs and services for immigrant students at community colleges nationwide. National in scope, CCCIE receives financial support from the J.M. Kaplan Fund and is hosted by Westchester Community College in Valhalla, NY. 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.

BLUE RIBBON PANEL MEMBERS

CCCIE’s national Blue Ribbon Panel includes representatives from a variety of community colleges across the country, professional associations, and experts in the field. BRP member organizations include:

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