

The Voluntary Framework for Accountability

ACCT IS HELPING LEAD A NEW ACCOUNTABILITY EFFORT TO ALLOW COMMUNITY COLLEGES TO BENCHMARK THEIR SUCCESSES. ON THESE PAGES, EDUCATION AND FOUNDATION LEADERS EXPLAIN THE VFA'S POTENTIAL IMPACT.

WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION AND LUMINA FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATION, a new accountability standards initiative will help prepare community college leaders to demonstrate the effectiveness and relevance of their institutions. The partnership, which includes the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and The College Board, will identify a Voluntary Framework for Accountability, or VFA, that will more accurately capture the unique roles and varied missions of the nation's 1,200 community and technical colleges.

The project will identify the constituencies with the greatest interest in the effectiveness of community colleges and the areas to benchmark that best illuminate the effectiveness and value of community colleges.

Critical constituencies include:

- The institutions and systems themselves, so that they may engage in ongoing quality improvement;
- Federal, state, and local leaders seeking assurance that community colleges are spending public dollars wisely; and
- Prospective students and families.

The VFA should also provide comparative data about the effectiveness of institutions in a specific geographic area. The proposed project will include test and pilot phases prior to completion of the framework.

Why are the guiding principles that will drive the development of this framework so important? Leaders of the five organizations supporting the development of the VFA share their perspectives on what ACCT President and Chief Executive Officer J. Noah Brown calls "the most important public policy work that trustees have undertaken to fulfill their governance responsibilities."



HILARY PENNINGTON
Director of Education,
Postsecondary Success, and Special Initiatives
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

In a time when enrollment numbers have surged and community colleges have received unprecedented attention, the value of a community college education has never been clearer. Yet many leaders are concerned about the success of students at community colleges. How many will actually go on to earn a degree or credential? How prepared are those students for the jobs that await them? Without an accepted accountability system that aligns with the multiple missions of community colleges, measuring progress is difficult. Our goal is to help more students complete college. Colleges need accountability systems that will help students maintain, and even accelerate, their effort toward a degree.



JAMIE P. MERISOTIS
 President and Chief Executive Officer,
 Lumina Foundation for Education

Community college enrollment has surged with the lagging economy. Now more than ever, those students need aligned accountability standards to enable their ability to attain a degree or credential.

The Voluntary Framework of Accountability system will include a common set of measures and data definitions. The VFA will be designed to document the extent to which community colleges and systems are meeting their stated missions; using public resources effectively; responding to community, business, and industry needs; and providing descriptive information for students and families, as well as appropriate student outcome data. This work will lead to planning for VFA national implementation which ultimately will impact 1,200 community colleges throughout the United States and many other stakeholders. It is closely aligned with Lumina's broader efforts to focus on high-quality learning as part of the goal of ensuring that 60 percent of Americans are college educated by 2025. It also addresses head-on the need to reframe traditional community college assumptions about access to a focus on student success. Attainment of postsecondary degrees and credentials is now the name of the game, and we are excited about the VFA's potential influence on postsecondary attainment.



GEORGE R. BOGGS
 President and Chief Executive Officer,
 AACC

There is need for a transparent process through which community colleges can communicate data that depict the most accurate portrait of their institutions and their effectiveness in producing successful outcomes for a highly diverse student

population. Like the collaborating partners whose work resulted in the voluntary systems of accountability of other higher education sectors, community college leaders also recognize the need for an accountability process — one that contributes to institutional improvement of community colleges and satisfies the expectations of external constituencies. While portions of the systems developed by the four-year sectors may be applicable to community colleges, the systems were designed by and for four-year colleges and universities and are not entirely appropriate for community colleges. Lack of commonly accepted performance measures has often led to misperceptions of community colleges, resulted in an inadequate estimate of their effectiveness, and ignored the colleges' contributions to their communities and states. The absence of common measures also has limited the ability of the institutions to identify problems and to set goals for improvement of outcomes.



J. NOAH BROWN
 President and Chief Executive Officer,
 ACCT

ACCT and AACC have a longstanding collaborative relationship in advancing America's community colleges. The elected and appointed trustees that govern the nation's 1,200 community, technical, and junior colleges represent

the face of public accountability within their communities and states and at the national level. Trustees set the mission of the colleges they govern, hire the chief executive officer (the chancellor or president), and monitor progress toward institutional goals. As fiduciaries and public stewards of their institutions, trustees are directly accountable to the ownership — local, community, or state — and are recognized as the principal authority by statute and accrediting bodies. Trustees work with policymakers at all levels to ensure that their colleges remain both accessible and accountable to their multiple constituencies. The ACCT Board of Directors identified the VFA as a priority more than two years ago. ACCT, in partnership with AACC and The College Board, has worked purposefully to establish a statement of principles and plans to develop a voluntary framework of accountability that will appropriately describe the multiplicity of roles played by community colleges. This project represents the most important public policy work that trustees have undertaken to fulfill their governance responsibilities.



RONALD A. WILLIAMS
 Vice President,
 The College Board

In 2007, the College Board convened a group of community college professionals to investigate the role of community colleges in America. One very strong theme emerging from those conversations was a concern

that the multiple missions of the community college were not well understood by others. This was particularly troubling, since people responsible for funding community colleges were among those who made incomplete judgments about community colleges. The College Board participants felt that a strong statement was needed to define not simply the missions of the community college, but also to develop a mechanism by which the missions could and should be measured in order to show the extraordinary ways in which the colleges respond to the challenges within their communities. The College Board determined it was important to assist community colleges in highlighting the important work they do. The College Board is proud to be a partner in the proposed work.