Transforming Community College System Key to U.S. Competitiveness

*Milestone Report Outlines 7 Specific Recommendations for the Future*

ORLANDO – Today, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) released a report that calls for dramatic changes to America’s community colleges to ensure U.S. competitiveness. The report outlines seven specific recommendations for reforming the country’s community college system in its new report, *Reclaiming the American Dream: A Report from the 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges*.

The report’s counsel center on the “Three Rs” of reform: Redesign, Reinvent and Reset. These are defined as a redesign of students’ educational experiences, a reinvention of institutional roles, and a resetting of the system to create partnerships and incentives for student and institutional success.

“We need to completely reimagine community colleges for today and the future,” said Dr. Walter G. Bumphus, AACC’s president and CEO, who commissioned the report. “It is important that college graduates be not just globally competitive but also globally competent, understanding their roles as citizens and workers in an international context. In today’s knowledge economy, intellectual capital is a nation’s greatest, most renewable natural resource.”

Bumphus went on to say, “Higher education is struggling with low student success rates and employers complain about inadequate student preparation for the job market. Our underinvestment in higher education not only wastes our human capital, it threatens U.S. global economic leadership, contributes to the erosion of our middle class, and calls into question the viability of the American dream, with its promise of upward mobility for each generation.”

The report states low student success rates and inadequate job preparation hinder middle-class students and have a devastating effect on low-income students and students of color, those often in greatest need of what community colleges have to offer.

In a rapidly changing America and a drastically reshaped world, the Commission notes, sustaining the American Dream is at risk. The ground beneath the nation’s feet has shifted so dramatically that community colleges – which had their greatest growth period to respond to societal needs in the 1960s and 1970s – need to re-imagine their roles and the ways in which they work. A highly educated population is fundamental to economic growth and community colleges play a significant role in ensuring the American dream. Stepping up to this challenge will require dramatic redesign of these institutions, their mission, and, most critically, their students’ educational experiences.

The report’s recommendations are:
1. Increase completion rates of community college credentials (certificates and associate degrees) by 50 percent by 2020, while preserving access, enhancing quality, and eradicating attainment gaps associated with income, race, ethnicity, and gender.

2. Dramatically improve college readiness: by 2020, reduce by half the numbers of students entering college unprepared for rigorous college-level work, and double the rate of students who complete developmental education programs and progress to successful completion of related freshman-level courses.

3. Close the American skills gaps by sharply focusing career and technical education on preparing students with the knowledge and skills required for existing and future jobs in regional and global economies.

4. Refocus the community college mission and redefine institutional roles to meet 21st-century educational and employment needs.

5. Invest in support structures to serve multiple community colleges through collaboration among institutions and with partners in philanthropy, government, and the private sector.

6. Target public and private investments strategically to create new incentives for educational institutions and their students and to support community college efforts to reclaim the American Dream.

7. Implement policies and practices that promote rigor, transparency, and accountability for results in community colleges.

The report also includes implementation strategies for each of the seven recommendations.

“This report is intended to be a bold roadmap – a working document – for community colleges to use as they implement these recommendations. To assist in this challenging work, AACC will establish the 21st Century Center to assist members with strategic planning, leadership development and research,” said Bumphus.

The report is the culmination of phase 2 of AACC’s 21st-Century Initiative. The overall goal of the initiative is to position community colleges to educate an additional five million students with degrees, certificates, or other credentials by 2020. The initiative enjoyed the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, ACT, and the Educational Testing Service. The report was written by the 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, which was co-chaired by Augustine “Augie” Gallego, chancellor emeritus, San Diego Community College District; Kay McClenny, director, Center for Community College Student Engagement, The University of Texas at Austin; and Jerry Sue Thornton, president, Cuyahoga Community College.

Additional resources:

**About the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)**

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is the primary advocacy organization for the nation's community colleges. The association represents nearly 1,200 two-year, associate degree–granting institutions and more than 13 million students. AACC promotes community colleges through five strategic action areas: recognition and advocacy for community colleges; student access, learning, and success; community college leadership development; economic and workforce development; and global and intercultural education. Information about AACC and community colleges may be found at [www.aacc.nche.edu](http://www.aacc.nche.edu). Follow AACC at [www.Facebook.com/CommCollege](http://www.Facebook.com/CommCollege) and [www.Twitter.com/Comm_College](http://www.Twitter.com/Comm_College).