PENNSYLVANIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES FIRST TO ADOPT VOLUNTARY FRAMEWORK OF ACCOUNTABILITY STATE-WIDE

WASHINGTON, DC -- Pennsylvania's 14 public community colleges today announced that they will adopt the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) as their state-wide accountability metrics. The colleges thus become the first state-wide system in the nation to publicly endorse the new framework, launched last year by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC).

 "This bold step by the Pennsylvania colleges reflects a willingness to step up and respond to challenges identified in the recently released report of the 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges" (http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/21stcenturyreport/index.html), stated AACC President Walter G. Bumphus. "The VFA provides, for the first time, metrics that are appropriate to the unique community college mission and will provide a significantly higher level of transparency in institutional performance. Adoption of the VFA is an AACC priority and is a cornerstone of our strategy to meet national completion goals," Bumphus noted.

The VFA metrics, first unveiled last fall, give community colleges what has long been lacking in reporting their successes to the public and policymakers: specific, nationally defined metrics that assess how colleges do in areas such as student progress and achievement and career and technical education programs (credit and noncredit), and transparency in reporting learning outcomes. Until now, the colleges largely have been assessed using the same measures as 4-year universities, although 2-year colleges serve a much more diverse student population and have a broader operational mission.

"The VFA is, ultimately, a focus on student success," said Alex Johnson, president of the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC) and president of the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges. CCAC was one of the pilot institutions that helped to develop the VFA. "Pennsylvania has long been a national leader in promoting academic and professional success for those who come to our community colleges. These metrics will help to ensure that Pennsylvania's community college students are receiving the best education we can provide."

AACC expects to make the VFA data system fully operational in 2013 and is developing the tool to allow colleges to upload and share their VFA data. Once this system is online, colleges will be able to benchmark their own institutional data against data of appropriate peer institutions to better understand how they are doing.

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"The systematic collection of student progress and completion data will enable Pennsylvania community colleges to be stronger advocates for advancing policy issues aimed at improving student access and success," said Dr. Karen A. Stout, president of Montgomery County Community College -- one of 40 community colleges nationally to pilot the VFA in 2011 — and member of the VFA working group on student outcomes and progression

Following a successful pilot phase by 58 colleges in 2011, the VFA program published a comprehensive metrics manual that is currently in use by colleges in multiple states.   In response to calls to develop accountability metrics for performance funding or a college "report card," community college leaders in Arizona, Ohio, Nebraska, New York, and Illinois are using the VFA to inform their work. Arizona just released its Long-Term Strategic Vision's 2012 Technical Guide and adopted many cohort and metrics definitions from the VFA.

The VFA is a key component for AACC to help colleges attain increased student completions. The association is working with higher education organizations, accrediting bodies, and public entities to leverage VFA implementation with related accountability initiatives. Over the coming months AACC will urge adoption of the VFA among member colleges as well as college boards and state accountability offices.

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The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is a national organization representing close to 1,200 community, junior and technical colleges nationwide. Community colleges are the largest and fastest growing sector of higher education, enrolling more than 13 million credit and non-credit students annually. To learn more about community colleges and AACC, see www.aacc.nche.edu.