



**Student Success Center  
NETWORK**

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# OHIO: PEER LEARNING HELPS RAISE OUR COLLECTIVE GAME

The Ohio Student Success Center is leveraging state policy and peer learning to help the state's 23 community colleges accelerate campus reforms and advance student success. Many of its efforts are centered on the Center's intensive Student Success Leadership Institute (SSLI). The Center developed the SSLI with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates.

To boost student completion, Ohio has moved to a 100 percent outcomes-based funding formula for all colleges and universities. And to further sharpen the focus on student success, the state has adopted the following goal: By 2025, 65 percent of Ohioans aged 25 to 64 will have earned a credential—a certificate, degree, or other postsecondary credential—of value in the workplace.

Every two years, the state requires each college and university to submit a completion plan, which is a detailed plan for increasing the number and percentage of students earning meaningful postsecondary credentials. The first round of plans were submitted in 2014.

### **Training Plus Coaching**

"With our involvement in Completion by Design (CBD) and other initiatives, we were moving to a statewide guided pathways effort, and 100 percent performance funding helped create some urgency around action," says Laura Rittner, executive director of the Ohio Student Success Center. "We saw an opportunity to use SSLI meetings and resources to provide strategic support to colleges as they updated their 2016 completion plans."

The Center launched the SSLI series in November 2015, and the February 2016 Institute focused on helping colleges develop their completion plans and lay the groundwork for implementing guided pathways. By the end of 2016, the Center had hosted six Institutes, four of which were held between February and June 2016, when the second round of completion plans were due. Participation in the Institutes is high, with an average team participation rate of 99 percent and average total attendance of about 200 people at each meeting (including staff and partners).



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Because the state-required completion plans use a template that follows the CBD framework, the SSLI built on CBD work that was already underway at three Ohio colleges. The three CBD colleges served as lead colleges and became coaches to 17 other colleges in the state. (The three remaining colleges are part of the national American Association of Community Colleges Pathways Project and had coaching through that work.)

“During the 2016 Institutes, we aimed to bring all 23 colleges to the same level of awareness about guided pathways and evidence-based practices,” Rittner explains. “Coaching from the CBD colleges spurred collaboration across the colleges and helped colleges get valuable advice for their completion plans.” In addition, twice during this process, the Center rotated the CBD coaches so colleges could get additional perspectives on their plans.

The Center also gave colleges access to data coaches, who helped the colleges determine how to measure their progress toward their goals. Data coaches include staff members from college institutional research offices, university staff, and Achieving the Dream coaches.

After June, when the colleges' strategic completion plans were complete, the Institutes shifted focus and began to provide support for implementing the plans. The Center also added a technical assistance component to the work, offering speakers who could go to individual campuses to help college faculty and staff learn about implementing their college's plan.

### **Building a Team Effort**

The SSLI and peer coaching are getting a lot of attention in Ohio and beyond, including from other Centers and states trying to do similar work. These efforts also have led to new partnerships, including one with the Community College Research Center (CCRC), which is now making its expertise available to all of the colleges and conducting field research at six of them.

The 2017 Institutes are largely focused on implementation, with an emphasis on data and equity. The Center also is hosting more regional meetings and stepping up both data coaching and technical assistance on campuses. In 2018, the work will return to planning as the colleges prepare to submit their 2018 completion plans to the state department of education.



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“We are working more closely with the state than we ever have in the past,” Rittner says. “We are speaking with the same broad goals and not overwhelming the campuses with so many new expectations. And recently, when the department was preparing for a series of campus visits related to advising, they asked us about guided pathways so they would know what questions to ask and how to support the ongoing work.”

**Keeping the Focus on the Data**

Performance funding is still relatively new, and the Center is helping colleges understand where they stand with regard to the new funding model. Each year, the Center gives each college an analysis of its status using the performance-funding metrics. The Center’s analysis looks at outcomes for different student groups and includes research questions the colleges should ask (and discuss with faculty and staff) if they are below their targets.

“Colleges are starting to see where some of their investments are paying off,” Rittner says. “The peer learning led to deep involvement in implementation, and colleges now can see how each thing they are doing fits into the guided pathways framework, helps them attain their performance-funding targets, and supports student success.”