

# Breaking Through

Helping Low-Skilled Adults Enter and Succeed in College and Careers



## Twenty-Six Community Colleges Participate in National Initiative

Around the country, innovative community colleges are helping low-skilled adults gain the valuable skills and credentials that are the gateway to family-supporting careers.

Breaking Through, a multi-year demonstration project, promotes and enhances the efforts of community colleges to help low-literacy adults prepare for and succeed in occupational and technical degree programs.

The project is a partnership of Jobs for the Future and the National Council for Workforce Education.

### ***Rationale***

The evidence is increasingly persuasive that a postsecondary credential is the key to jobs and careers that pay family-sustaining wages, yet almost 90 million adults in the United States lack the academic skills needed for admission to community college occupational/technical degree programs.

Moreover, research shows that relatively few adults enroll in programs whose purpose is to increase academic skills, and very few adults in these programs ever advance through the steps essential for postsecondary credentials. For example, about 2 million adults annually enroll in adult basic education, the major federal program geared to this population. Of these ABE students, 7 percent complete the GED, about one-third of those who complete the GED enroll in college GED, and a mere 4 percent of GED completers earn a two-year college degree. The goal of Breaking Through is to strengthen postsecondary outcomes for low-income adults by focusing on strategies that create more effective pathways through pre-college and degree-level programs.

### ***Synergistic, High-Leverage Strategies***

Breaking Through focuses on four key strategies to increase access to and success in college for low-literacy adults.

- 1 Re-organize colleges.**  
Establish links among programs so that low-income students can navigate them easily for advancement.
- 2 Accelerate Learning.**  
Help students learn more and faster and to complete programs more quickly.
- 3 Assure a labor market payoff.**  
Offer students intermediate credentials, jobs, and other quick economic rewards.
- 4 Provide comprehensive supports.**  
Help students develop realistic plans and provide supports that keep them enrolled in and attending school, particularly through difficult transition points.

## Breaking Through

is a project of Jobs for the Future and the National Council for Workforce Education.

For more information, see [www.breakingthroughcc.org](http://www.breakingthroughcc.org)

## ***Partners' Approach***

---

Breaking Through has four main components:

- Seven colleges play leadership roles. Each Leadership College has demonstrated a strong commitment to, and significant progress toward, the goal of advancing low-skilled adults. These colleges receive funding and technical support to expand and institutionalize their approaches.
- Fifteen institutions have been designated as Learning Colleges. These colleges already have begun to restructure their offerings to support the advancement of low-literacy students to degree programs, and they have demonstrated their commitment to doing more. They benefit from opportunities to learn from one another and also receive technical assistance from NCWE and JFF.
- For community college leaders, the initiative is expanding awareness of the growing need to serve low-literacy adults. It is also enhancing expertise about promising strategies for helping such students enter and succeed in postsecondary education.
- At the state level, the initiative identifies and disseminates information about policies that support the advancement of low-literacy adults into and through college degree programs.

Breaking Through is a unique collaboration between an organization committed to strengthening community colleges' success with low-income students—Jobs for the Future—and an organization of community college-based workforce development leaders—the National Council for Workforce Education.

JFF is a leading innovator in strategies to accelerate education and career advancement for both young people and adults. NCWE committed to this project in order to aid its members develop effective pipelines for low-literacy adults into good technical programs.

## ***Funding***

---

Grants from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Foundation support efforts to promote the implementation of strategies and programs to help low-literacy adults prepare for and succeed in community college occupational and technical degree programs.

The Ford Foundation supports the Breaking Through state policy efforts. This work focuses on researching, documenting, and testing state policies that improve outcomes for low-skill adults in their efforts to succeed in college and careers.

## ***The Leadership Colleges Are:***

---

- Central New Mexico Community College  
*Albuquerque, NM*
- Community College of Denver  
*Denver, CO*
- Cuyahoga Community College  
*Cleveland, OH*
- Durham Technical Community College  
*Durham, NC*
- Owensboro Community and Technical College  
*Owensboro, KY*
- Portland Community College  
*Portland, OR*
- Southeast Arkansas College  
*Pine Bluff, AR*

## ***The Learning Colleges Are:***

---

- Cerritos College  
*Norwalk, CA*
- City College of San Francisco  
*San Francisco, CA*
- Community College of Southern Nevada  
*Las Vegas, NV*
- Davidson County Community College  
*Lexington, NC*
- Forsyth Technical Community College  
*Winston-Salem, NC*
- Houston Community College  
*Houston, TX*
- LaGuardia Community College/City University of New York  
*New York, NY*
- Mott Community College  
*Flint, MI*
- North Shore Community College  
*Danvers, MA*
- Northampton Community College  
*Bethlehem, PA*
- Pamlico Community College  
*Grantsboro, NC*
- Piedmont Virginia Community College  
*Charlottesville, VA*
- Pitt Community College  
*Winterville, NC*
- South Piedmont Community College  
*Polkton, NC*
- South Seattle Community College  
*Seattle, WA*
- St. Philip's College  
*San Antonio, TX*
- Tacoma Community College  
*Tacoma, WA*
- Tallahassee Community College  
*Tallahassee, FL*
- York County Community College  
*Wells, ME*