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January 13, 2023

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
c/o Hillary Risler, Esq.
Office of Policy and Legal Analysis
13 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

The Maine Community College System is providing this letter in accordance with 20-A MRSA §10013. This law requires the Maine Community College System (MCCS), University of Maine System (UMS), and Maine Maritime Academy (MMA) to provide the following information about first-generation college students by January 15th of each year:

- A. Data regarding enrollment of first-generation college students and educational outcomes, including graduation rates for first-generation college students compared with other college students; and
- B. A summary of strategies used, and activities undertaken to increase enrollment and graduation rates of first-generation college students and any available data indicating the effect of those strategies and activities; and
- C. Plans for or recommendations regarding new strategies or actions designed to increase enrollment and graduation rates of first-generation college students.

To meet the requirements of the legislation, MCCS worked with the University of Maine System and Maine Maritime Academy to coordinate data collection and reporting to promote a common framework for determining enrollment and educational outcomes of first-generation college students. Additionally, the three institutions agreed that for the purpose of this report, we would define a first-generation student as one with neither parent having completed a college degree. Each institution determined the level of college completion appropriate to its mission.

For MCCS, a student is first-generation if neither parent has earned an associate degree. For UMS and MMA, a student is first-generation if neither parent has earned a bachelor's degree. For consistency, we are also providing data on MCCS students with neither parent having earned a bachelor's degree.

The three institutions agreed that questions on applications for admission related to parents' highest level of education should provide students the opportunity to be specific about the degree completed by each parent. Since previously this information had not been consistently requested or collected by MCCS, our colleges revised their applications for new students entering in the fall of 2014.



Enrollment by first-generation college status

Community colleges serve more first-generation students than any other sector of U.S. higher education. According to a 2018 study by the National Center for Education Statistics, nearly half of all first-generation college students attend a community college.¹

Although approximately one-third of students entering two- and four-year colleges in the United States each year are first-generation (as defined by parental attainment of a bachelor’s degree), that figure is nearly twice as high at Maine’s community colleges where 58% of entering students meet this definition of first generation.

The percentage of entering MCCS students who are first-generation has declined in the years since we began tracking this data in Fall 2014. The following table provides an overview of Systemwide data from Fall 2016 to Fall 2022. This decline is consistent with national data. As the percent of Americans with a college degree increases, the share of children who are first-generation college continues to shrink. Nevertheless, MCCS continues to serve a significantly higher percentage of first-generation students than the national average.

MCCS Entering Students	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
Neither parent has an associate degree	47%	46%	46%	44%	42%	41%
Neither parent has a bachelor’s degree	65%	65%	64%	62%	58%	58%

Student outcomes

This report details three-year outcomes (150% time to completion) for first-generation college students who entered a Maine community college in the fall semester, 2016 – 2019. The data captures graduation, transfer, and still-enrolled rates using methods consistent with National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) reporting.

Beginning with the Spring 2020 semester, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on our students’ ability to persist and complete their education, especially those who are low-income, many of whom are first generation. That reality is reflected in the three-year outcomes for first-generation students who entered MCCS in the fall of 2018.

Our colleges remain focused on the student success initiatives outlined in this report and on the impact they have had, and will continue to have, on first- generation and other groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education.

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, *Stats in Brief, First-Generation Students: College Access, Persistence, and Postbachelor’s Outcome*, February 2018, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018421.pdf>.



Three-year outcomes of entering degree-seeking students (Fall Cohorts 2015 – 2019)

Fall 2015 Cohort

Status	Associate		Bachelor's	
	First-generation Neither parent has associate degree	Not first-generation One or both parents has associate degree	First-generation Neither parent has Bachelor's degree	Not first-generation One or both parents has Bachelor's degree
Graduated	24%	28%	24%	28%
Still Enrolled	11%	11%	11%	11%
Transferred	15%	19%	15%	21%
Not Attending	50%	42%	49%	40%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Fall 2016 Cohort

Status	Associate		Bachelor's	
	First-generation Neither parent has associate degree	Not first-generation One or both parents has associate degree	First-generation Neither parent has Bachelor's degree	Not first-generation One or both parents has Bachelor's degree
Graduated	26%	28%	27%	27%
Still Enrolled	11%	12%	11%	12%
Transferred	15%	20%	16%	20%
Not Attending	49%	41%	47%	40%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Fall 2017 Cohort

Status	Associate		Bachelor's	
	First-generation Neither parent has associate degree	Not first-generation One or both parents has associate degree	First-generation Neither parent has Bachelor's degree	Not first-generation One or both parents has Bachelor's degree
Graduated	23%	28%	25%	27%
Still Enrolled	10%	10%	10%	9%
Transferred	15%	20%	16%	22%
Not Attending	52%	42%	49%	42%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Fall 2018 Cohort

Status	Associate		Bachelor's	
	First-generation Neither parent has associate degree	Not first-generation One or both parents has associate degree	First-generation Neither parent has Bachelor's degree	Not first-generation One or both parents has Bachelor's degree
Graduated	25%	30%	27%	31%
Still Enrolled	9%	9%	9%	10%
Transferred	14%	18%	15%	18%
Not Attending	51%	42%	49%	41%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.



Fall 2019 Cohort

Status	Associate		Bachelor's	
	First- generation Neither parent has associate degree	Not first- generation One or both parents has associate degree	First-generation Neither parent has Bachelor's degree	Not first-generation One or both parents has Bachelor's degree
Graduated	16%	20%	17%	21%
Still Enrolled	22%	22%	21%	23%
Transferred	10%	12%	10%	13%
Not Attending	52%	46%	52%	43%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

The data, disaggregated by first-generation status, are included in Tables 1 and 2 in the appendix to this report.

Targeted strategies

MCCS has placed a strategic focus on student success measures designed to support first- generation students and others who traditionally have been underrepresented in higher education and who often face significant challenges in accessing postsecondary education, succeeding academically once they enroll, and completing a degree. These strategies include:

- **EMBARK, DUAL ENROLLMENT, AND HIGH SCHOOL PATHWAYS** (formerly Early College for ME) through the high school-to-college transition. EMBARK works with Maine students who may need additional support as they transition from high school to college and connects them to the career, academic, and financial resources they need for success in and beyond community college. These high-school based advisors meet individually with EMBARK and dual enrollment students and create personal relationships that students rely on during the transition to college. The program’s outcomes indicate that the early advising and guidance have a lasting impact, as Embark students who enroll in community college are more likely to return for their second year and graduate on time. Central to that advising is connecting goals, job opportunities, and post-secondary education to help high school students identify a path and start their academic journey while in high school.
- **TRIO Student Support Services Programs** at each of our colleges. These programs are designed specifically to serve low-income, first-generation college students and offer comprehensive, individual support through academic planning, tutoring, financial aid assistance, financial literacy, and guidance in course selection and registration.
- **On-campus employment opportunities** that allow students to build their work schedule around their classes and provide them with a stronger sense of community and a stronger support network.
- **Intensive college readiness experiences** offered at no cost in the summer before student enrolls in a program of study.
- **Guided Pathways** streamline a student’s journey by providing structured choice, revamped support, and clear learning outcomes to help students achieve their goals. At the heart of Guided Pathways is a recognition that the current self-service model of community colleges leads many



students to unintended dead ends or unforeseen detours in the form of excess or out-of-sequence credit. The four pillars of Guided Pathways are: clarify the path (creating clear pathways to employment and further education); enter the path (help students choose); stay on the path (support students to stay on their path); and ensure learning (follow through and ensure results).

The MCCS launched this effort through our work on Math Pathways. Math Pathways took a very systemic approach to improving student success and completion rates in math, which is often a critical barrier to success for students. In Math Pathways students enroll in a gateway, college level math course that is relevant to their program of study, rather than the heretofore traditional gateway college algebra course— a course that is now viewed as inappropriate for non-STEM students. The need for remediation has been also reduced and often eliminated using multiple measures to determine student readiness for college level math, rather than using one, high stakes placement test, and using co-requisite remediation in which students who need additional support receive it in real time through linked mandatory tutoring. In the time since math pathways was first launched, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of students successfully completing a 100-level math course and an equally dramatic decrease in remediation.

In addition, MCCS has expanded the number of college navigators, or advisors, at all seven colleges, to help ensure that students—especially those with little experience of college – have the academic and personal supports they need to persist and complete a college degree.

Finally, we remain committed to making sure our colleges are as affordable as possible. Maine’s community colleges continue to offer the lowest tuition and fees in New England.

I would be glad to meet with you at any time to address questions or concerns the Committee may have regarding our students who are the first in their family to attend college.

David Daigler, MCCS

President

cc: Pender Makin, Commissioner, Department of Education
Joseph Marro, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Governor

² <https://completecollege.org/strategy/math-pathways/>

³ <https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/accelerated-pathways-student-success-mathematics.pdf>



Maine Community College System

The source for data in the tables is the MCCS Data Mart. Only first-time and transfer-in students with reported parental education levels are included. Data are self-reported by applicants on the application for admission.

College	Entering Students #	Neither parent has a(n):			
		Associate Degree		Bachelor's Degree	
	#	#	%	#	%
CMCC	874	395	45%	543	62%
EMCC	659	230	42%	355	58%
KVCC	227	107	47%	158	65%
NMCC	213	96	43%	133	63%
SMCC	1,694	650	37%	916	52%
WCCC	117	55	46%	81	67%
YCCC	106	53	49%	70	67%
MCCS Total	3,890	1,586	41%	2,256	58%

Only first-time and transfer-in students with reported parental education levels are included in the table above. Fall 2021 total entering students: 3,754.

Status	Associate		Bachelor's	
	First-Generation	Not First-Generation	First-Generation	Not First-Generation
	Neither parent has Associate degree	One or both parents has Associate degree	Neither parent has Bachelor's degree	One or both parents has Bachelor's degree
Graduated	16%	20%	17%	21%
Still Enrolled	22%	22%	21%	23%
Transferred	10%	12%	10%	13%
Not Attending	52%	46%	52%	43%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Based on 3,842 first-time and transfer-in students entering in fall 2018 with reported parental education levels. Fall 2018 total entering students: 4,309. Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

More information on First Generation students can be found at: <https://pnpi.org/first-generation-student>