



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
323 State Street, Augusta, ME 04330-7131  
(207) 629-4000 | Fax (207) 629-4048 | mccs.me.edu

January 15, 2025

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
c/o Elena Roig  
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:

- 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.

A decade ago, 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, slightly more than half of all first-generation college students attend a community college.<sup>1</sup>

Although approximately one-quarter of students entering two- and four-year colleges in the United States each year are first-generation (as defined by parental attainment of a post-secondary education experience), that figure is nearly twice as high at Maine’s community colleges where 42% of entering students’ parents had not completed an associate degree and 58% had not completed a bachelor’s degree.



*“As a first-generation student, the journey into higher education can be filled with confusion, self-doubt, and challenging terrain. It can also be awe-inspiring, adventurous, risky, and exhilarating.” – SMCC first-generation student*

The percentage of entering MCCC students who are first-generation had declined in the years since we began tracking this data in Fall 2014, however this fall we saw a slight uptick. The following table provides an overview of systemwide data from Fall 2018 to Fall 2024.

MCCC Entering Students	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Fall 2024
Neither parent has an associate degree	46%	46%	44%	42%	41%	40%	42%
Neither parent has a bachelor’s degree	65%	64%	62%	58%	58%	57%	58%

As the percent of Americans with a college degree increases, the share of children who are first-generation continues to shrink. For context, according to the U.S. Census, the percentage of Maine residents aged 25 and over with an associate degree or higher has increased by 13.1%.

- 2010 = 33.7% of Maine residents have an associate degree or higher
- 2014 = 37.3% of Maine residents have an associate degree or higher
- 2018 = 41.2% of Maine residents have an associate degree or higher
- 2022 = 46.8% of Maine residents have an associate degree or higher

This is a 13.1% **gain** in the last 12 years. This data tells an important story, not only about our success but that of all of Maine’s institutions of higher education. We are educating people and reducing the portion of our population who are first generation moving forward.

At the same time, MCCC has focused our efforts on Maine adults who have some college but did not complete their degree. Maine has seen improvement in these numbers as well.

- 2010 = 20.1% (188,340) have some college with no degree
- 2014 = 20.3% (194,760) have some college with no degree
- 2018 = 20.4% (200,338) have some college with no degree
- 2022 = 17.8% (182,869) have some college with no degree



This metric suggests that our efforts to promote education to those aged 25+ with some college but no degree has resulted in a growth in educational attainment. This will likely decrease the pool of first-generation students going forward.

### 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 of 2015 through the fall semester of 2021. 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.

From the Spring 2020 semester through Spring 2021, COVID-19 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 2019 and in 2020 particularly. While outcomes for students who entered in Fall 2021 improved, our colleges are seeing students, both first-generation and not, who have greater needs in order to persist and complete their degree post-COVID. Supporting these students to successful outcomes informs and frames how we use resources and structure our work. This is a “high touch” cohort of students, and our hardworking faculty and staff are adopting best practices, like Guided Pathways, to provide support and meet student needs.



Also, this year, the U.S. Department of Education's implementation of the new FAFSA application was plagued by delays and errors. These issues were felt especially hard by first generation students. To assist our applicants, our colleges held “FAFSA Nights,” worked incredibly closely with FAME to educate applicants, and worked around the clock to answer questions. Due to the hard work of our staff and the staff of FAME, we did not experience the drop in first-generation applications experienced by some other institutions.

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.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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 – 2021)

### 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%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

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%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

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%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

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%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

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%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

### Fall 2020 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	22%	30%	24%	30%
Still Enrolled	10%	9%	9%	9%
Transferred	16%	16%	15%	17%
Not Attending	52%	45%	51%	44%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

### Fall 2021 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	27%	34%	29%	33%
Still Enrolled	9%	8%	9%	8%
Transferred	12%	18%	13%	19%
Not Attending	51%	40%	49%	39%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

The data disaggregated by first-generation status are included 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. Our colleges' work extends into the secondary realm through a number of statewide programs which support and encourage students through the high school-to-college transition. The Maine Community College System offers the Embark scholarship program to over 80 Maine high schools and CTEs. Here, college-based access advisors travel to secondary schools to meet with Maine students who need additional support as they transition from high school to college and then connect them to the career, academic, and financial resources they need for success in and beyond community 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.

Our colleges also enroll over 7,000 Maine secondary students each year as early college students. Their courses take place on college campuses, online, or within secondary schools. Again, these students are supported by a network of advisors and college-based structures designed to help high school students identify a path and start their academic journey while still in high school. To that end, courses are offered as a part of a pathway that aligns to and provides Early College students a jump start in their college program of study, ensuring that more students earn credits with a purpose. In the future, and in collaboration with local secondary partners, our colleges will be working to scale some of the more innovative and successful dual enrollment opportunities such as Spring Ahead and Early College pathways. Spring Ahead, a near full-time college immersion experience for graduating seniors, has achieved near 100% college matriculation rates in recent years while prioritizing equitable access, and our early college pathways helped students earn actual college credentials within a year of high school completion.

- **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 support courses 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. The MCCS is continuing this work through participation in the Launch Year Initiative and scaling of Math Pathways across the campuses.

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. As a part of Guided Pathways, the colleges are also adopting a pathway approach to advising. Pathway advisors develop a deep understanding of the programs of study within their pathway and are assigned students who have selected that pathway. Advisors work collaboratively with the program faculty advisor to help students enter and stay on their chosen pathway. Clearly defined pathways simplify student decision-making and shifts the advising focus away from choosing classes to supporting progress toward the student’s goals.

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 the Committee may have regarding our students who are the first in their family to attend college.

Becky Smith

Director of Government and Community Relations

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

---

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

<sup>3</sup> <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.

**Table 2: Fall 2024 Entering Degree-Seeking Students First-Generation Students by College**

College	Entering Students #	Neither parent has a(n):			
		Associate Degree		Bachelor's Degree	
	#	#	%	#	%
CMCC	1164	472	41%	666	57%
EMCC	769	320	42%	445	58%
KVCC	589	273	46%	376	64%
NMCC	248	107	43%	162	65%
SMCC	2,021	828	41%	1114	55%
WCCC	174	94	54%	123	71%
YCCC	31	15	48%	21	68%
<b>MCCS Total</b>	<b>4,996</b>	<b>2,109</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>2,907</b>	<b>58%</b>

Only first-time and transfer-in students with reported parental education levels are included in the table above.





**Table 4: Three-Year Outcomes of Fall 2021 Entering Degree-Seeking Students by First-Generation Status and College**

		First-Generation Neither parent has a(n):				Not First-Generation One (or more) parent has at least a(n):			
		Associate		Bachelor's		Associate		Bachelor's	
College	Status	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
CMCC	Graduated	86	26%	123	27%	116	29%	79	28%
	Still Enrolled	28	8%	35	8%	32	8%	25	9%
	Transferred	46	14%	72	16%	89	22%	63	23%
	Not Attending	170	52%	227	50%	168	41%	111	40%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>100%</b>
EMCC	Graduated	60	29%	91	32%	108	38%	77	38%
	Still Enrolled	16	8%	20	7%	12	4%	8	4%
	Transferred	26	13%	34	12%	35	12%	27	13%
	Not Attending	106	51%	140	49%	127	45%	93	45%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>100%</b>
KVCC	Graduated	64	42%	94	44%	86	49%	56	49%
	Still Enrolled	11	7%	16	8%	14	8%	9	8%
	Transferred	14	9%	20	9%	22	13%	16	14%
	Not Attending	63	41%	83	39%	53	30%	33	29%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100%</b>
NMCC	Graduated	26	37%	44	41%	50	52%	32	53%
	Still Enrolled	6	8%	11	10%	8	8%	3	5%
	Transferred	5	7%	9	8%	10	10%	6	10%
	Not Attending	34	48%	43	40%	28	29%	19	32%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>
SMCC	Graduated	75	19%	114	20%	182	27%	143	27%
	Still Enrolled	51	13%	69	12%	74	11%	56	11%
	Transferred	57	14%	84	15%	138	20%	111	21%
	Not Attending	221	55%	296	53%	290	42%	215	41%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>563</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>684</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>525</b>	<b>100%</b>
WCCC	Graduated	18	42%	29	46%	28	55%	17	55%
	Still Enrolled	2	5%	2	3%	2	4%	2	6%
	Transferred	2	5%	4	6%	6	12%	4	13%
	Not Attending	21	49%	28	44%	15	29%	8	26%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100%</b>
YCCC	Graduated	11	32%	13	28%	10	27%	8	33%
	Still Enrolled	2	6%	3	6%	3	8%	2	8%
	Transferred	5	15%	5	11%	9	24%	9	38%
	Not Attending	16	47%	26	55%	15	41%	5	21%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100%</b>
MCCS Total	Graduated	340	27%	508	29%	580	34%	412	33%
	Still Enrolled	116	9%	156	9%	145	8%	105	8%
	Transferred	155	12%	228	13%	309	18%	236	19%



	Not Attending	631	51%	843	49%	696	40%	484	39%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1242</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1735</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1730</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1237</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Only first-time and transfer-in students with reported parental education levels are included in the table above.*

*Fall 2021 total entering students: 3,777. Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.*